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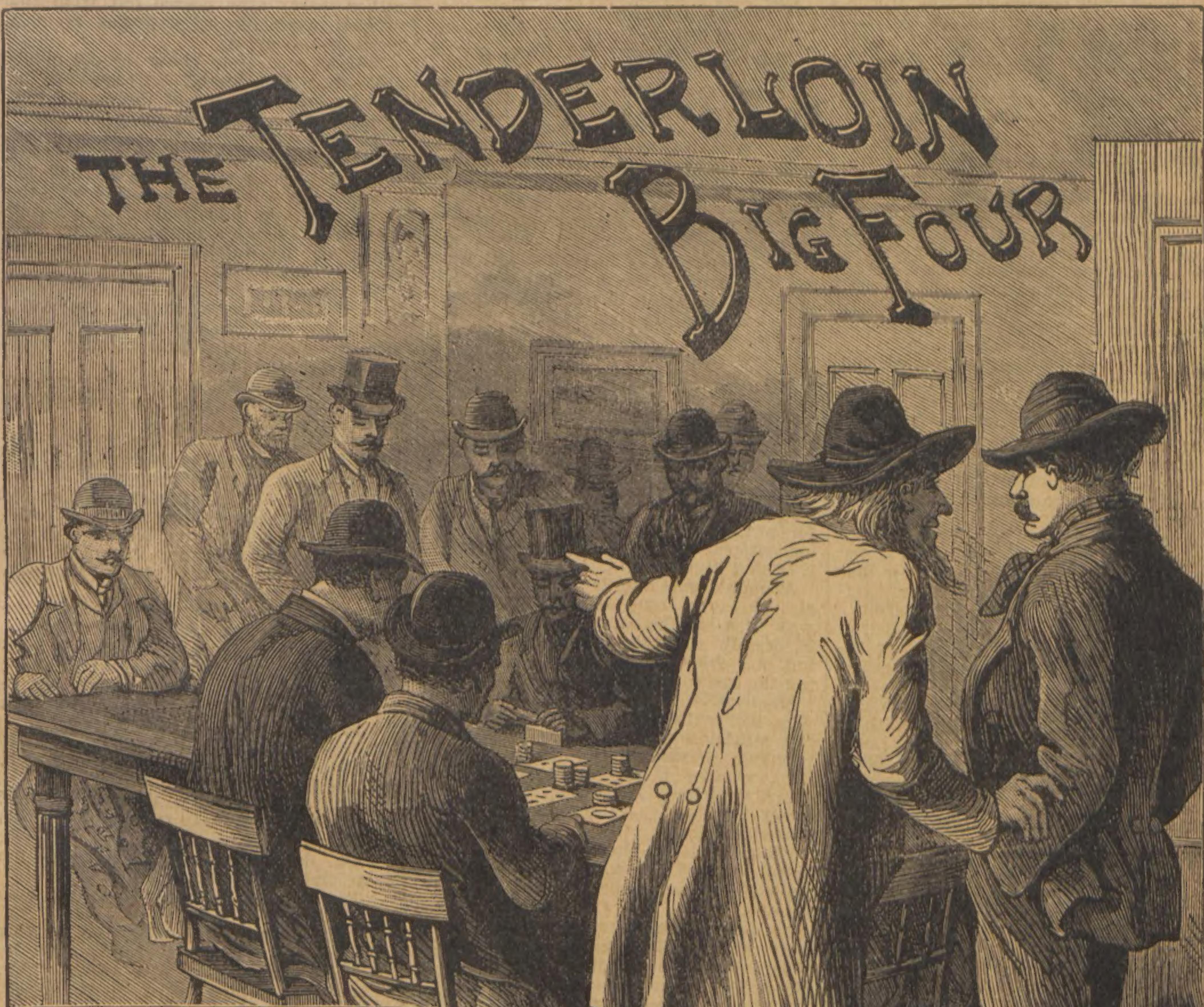
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OR, COLONEL BOB'S TRUMP BACKER.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,
AUTHOR OF THE "THAD BURR" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE OUTCAST.

"PENNILESS! A beggar! An outcast! My last dollar gone on the cursed horses! What shall I do? What will become of my poor wife and child?"

"W'AT'S DE USE O' GITTIN' MAD?" SAID THE PATRIARCH. "COME BACK AND WE'LL HAVE A GOOD TIME."

These dismal words fell from the lips of a gentlemanly, well-dressed man of less than thirty, as he staggered into a Park Row saloon and sank wearily into a chair.

"What's the matter, colonel?" demanded a cheerful, breezy chap, a few years younger, strolling up to the despondent man. "Bet on the wrong horse again?"

Colonel Bob Avondale raised his eyes languidly to the face of the speaker, and as suddenly dropped them again, at the same time muttering in a weary tone:

"Hullo, Charlie! Is that you?"

"Yes, it is I, colonel—what is left of me. But you seem down-hearted, old fellow. Been running up against hard luck?"

"Yes, the most cursed luck I ever had in my life. In short, Charlie, I have dropped the last penny I possessed in the world."

"It's too bad, old man, but cheer up. I'm in the same boat with you. I, too, have just dropped my wad. But what is the use of despairing? There is a better day coming!"

"It is all well enough for you to talk about a better day coming, my friend. You who have no one but yourself. It is different with me; there are the wife and child!"

"Ah, I know that, colonel, and for that reason, as well as for the fact that you are my friend and a good fellow, I sympathize with you from the bottom of my heart."

"A cursed fool I have been!" and the colonel moaned in his mental misery. "One year ago I was a wealthy, prosperous and happy man. I had as happy a home as man ever had, and then I got to playing the races, and now look at me! A pauper and a wreck of a man."

"Oh, cheer up, my good fellow, cheer up! May we both see better days."

"Ay, may we, indeed!" groaned the colonel. "There may be better days in store for you, but for me—never!"

Charlie Maynard was a happy-go-lucky young man of about twenty-five, noble and generous to a fault—a man, in short, who made plenty of money and spent it as freely as the autumnal forest sheds its leaves.

He and Avondale had been bosom friends from boyhood, and upon more than one occasion had shared their last dollar with each other; so now the sympathy expressed was true and heartfelt.

At this juncture a crowd of sporting men, who, like themselves, had just returned from the races, came hustling noisily into the saloon.

The expression of countenance, no less than the tone of voice, told which of them had been successful and which had lost.

One quite young and very sappy fellow was excessively jubilant, and from the immense package of crisp bills he constantly displayed, it was evident that he had been a plunger winner.

"Twenty thousand plunks, all on one go!" he cried, exultantly, over and over again, as he would draw the package from the side pocket of his sack coat, where he carelessly carried it, and slap it upon the bar or across his knee; "twenty thousand on one single go! I'm a Croesus, and money's no object to me!"

"A fool for a winner, every time," muttered the colonel, eyeing the youth contemptuously. "Oh, well, it's well that somebody can win."

"But it would be better if somebody with brains enough to enjoy it could win," interjected his friend. "That fellow is the Tenderloin Sport, you know. But look, colonel! Here comes—"

"Curse him!" muttered Colonel Avondale, through his clenched teeth; "the sight of him maddens me! I hope he will have the good sense to keep away from me, for, in my present humor, I am liable to do him an injury. It was he who led me into this reckless folly which has been my ruin."

At that moment the person in question, a handsome, well-built man of forty, faultlessly dressed, chanced to espy the colonel, and, suddenly pausing in his progress in the direction of the bar,

bowed, smilingly, at Avondale, and then, hastening toward him, extended his hand.

"How are you, colonel?" he saluted, cheerily. "You're looking blue."

Avondale frowned darkly and did not take the proffered hand.

"No!" he muttered, sulkily. "I shall not shake hands with you, cur that you are!"

"Ah!" and the other smiled as blandly as if the insult had been the most gracious compliment instead. "You are in a bad humor to-night. So be it. I shall see you again when you are feeling better."

"I hope not," retorted Avondale. "Curse you! It is my wish that I shall never see your devilish face again!"

"Ha! ha! ha! I don't think I ever saw you quite so irritable. But you will soon feel better."

"Go to blazes and get out of my sight before I harm you!" cried the colonel, jumping to his feet and brandishing his clenched fist in the fellow's face.

"All right, Bob!" laughed the other, gayly, moving away. "Ta-ta! colonel. My love to Helen!"

This last remark exasperated the colonel beyond endurance.

White with rage, he sprang over the table at his tormentor and drew his revolver.

"Utter that name again, and, by Heaven, you are a dead man!"

But, even this unquestionably earnest threat failed to disturb the other's equanimity. He still smiled placidly, although he did take the precaution to move toward the door with some alacrity.

When Avondale saw that his enemy's intention was to run, he paused and started to put away his pistol, but when the man reached the door and opened it, to depart, he again turned and, with the same exasperating grin, said:

"You won't forget to tell Helen that you saw me, will you, Bob? And, you might also ask her whether she doesn't think she would have done better to marry yours truly than the drunken pauper she now has!"

Blinded with passion, the colonel raised his revolver and fired.

"Curse you! Take that!"

But the bullet had done no damage, for, at the instant of this speech, the man had slipped through the door and closed it behind him.

Avondale was not to be so easily put out, however, and, dashing after him, was soon in the street, plunging along heedlessly through the darkness, with but one object in view—that of overtaking the insulter of his wife.

Meanwhile the crowd in the saloon who had witnessed the scene, discussed the situation and speculated upon the probable outcome of the affair.

"I wonder if the colonel'll overtake him?" said one.

"If he does, there will be fun," suggested another.

"And I don't blame him," put in a third. "That fellow, Fred Marboro, has been the cause of the colonel's downfall. It was he, in the guise of friendship, who induced him to gamble, knowing that the colonel's sanguine temperament would lead him to destruction if given the proper start."

"What induced Marboro to do a thing like that?" inquired one.

"Why, you see, Fred and the colonel were after the same girl—Nellie Watkins, and the colonel got the lead and married her, and ever since then Fred's had it in for him. He swore, so I've heard, that he would bring the colonel to ruin and make Nellie wish she'd married him. Well, I don't know whether she's ever wished she'd married Fred or not; but he's certainly succeeded in bringing Avondale to ruin. Why, he hadn't the price of a drink to-night when he came in!"

"What's that to you?" interposed Charlie Maynard, stepping up at that moment. "Colonel Avondale has seen the time when he could easily buy the lot of you!"

"Set 'em up again!" cried the lucky young sport at this moment. "Boys—everybody—have a drink with me! I've got plenty money. Twenty thousand pl—"

At that moment he thrust his hand into his side pocket, but, to his utter astonishment and consternation, the package of bills was gone.

"Oh! I've been robbed! My money's gone! Great Heaven! What shall I do? I'm ruined!"

"Wot's de matter, youngster?" inquired the Patriarch, with great solicitation.

"I've been robbed of all my money!" groaned the young man. "And, the worst of it is, I took five hundred dollars out of the boss's safe to play with."

"Oh, dat's nuttin'! You won't get over seven years on the Island for dat! Dat's nuttin'!"

CHAPTER II. THE DELUSION.

The Patriarch, as they called him, was close upon seventy years old, but remarkably agile and boyish in action, although in appearance he was every year that was claimed for him.

His hair, which he wore long, was snowy white, and his face was covered to the eyes with a frowsy beard of the same tinge, so that his small, black and rather merry eyes peered out from the tangled mass like glow-worms from a mesh of tall grass.

Nobody seemed to know the old man's real name, but among his associates he was known to be one of the coolest and cleverest all-round sharpers in the city.

Another peculiarity of the old man was his exceedingly good humor. Nothing could disturb his equanimity or ruffle his temper. He would pick a pocket with the same affability and pride that another man might weigh a pound of choice butter or add the finishing stroke to a masterpiece of painting.

So when he had relieved poor silly Tom Watson, the winning young sport, of his last cent, he proceeded to console with the young man in the fatherly fashion we have recorded.

"Yer won't git more'n seven years on de Island," he said, encouragingly. "Dat's nuttin'!"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the young man. "Seven years in the penitentiary? I might better be hanged at once!"

"It might be," rejoined the old sharp, arching his brows thoughtfully, "'cause it'll probly come ter dat sooner er later; but if yer feel any sort o' hankerin' to live awhile yit, yer lucky ter git de seven at hard labor."

"Oh, Lord! What shall I do?" the sport moaned, in his fright and distress.

"Say, young feller, yer takes it precious hard, an' as yer feels so bad about it, an' as yer seems ter be a purty square chap, I'll lend yer de five hundred plunks ter put back in de old bloke's safe."

"Will you?" cried Watson, eagerly.

"Dat's right," answered the Patriarch, smiling benevolently.

"Oh, thank you, a thousand times! What can I ever do to repay you for this kindness?"

"Oh, dat's easy! Yer kin repay me easy, and right away."

"I'm at your service. How can I do it?"

"Listen," said the old man, growing confidential, taking the young man by the arm and leading him aside. "Yer boss is something of a sport hisself, ain't he?"

"Yes; Mr. Marboro bets a little on the races."

"Very well, den. He's out a good deal o' nights, ain't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, as yer know, de rich Mrs. Lonsdale lives next door."

"I know."

"And she's got something like a hundred thousand dollars' wort o' diamonds, w'ich she keeps in her house."

"So I've heard."

"An' as I know, an' youse don't, dere's a dead easy way o' gitting from yer boss's house to dat of de widder, in a certain place, w'en yer knows how."

Watson stared and remained silent.

It just began to dawn upon him what the old rascal was driving at.

"Wal," pursued the Patriarch, still

smiling blandly, "all yer've got ter do is ter leave de boss's door onlocked ter night, an' we'll do de rest."

Watson turned deathly pale and made no reply.

"Will yer do it?"

The young man hesitated, and finally answered, firmly:

"No!"

"Suit yerself," muttered the Patriarch, with a significant shrug. "If yer don't, yer won't git de sugar to put back in yer boss's safe, an' afore dis time tomorrow, yer'll be a regular boarder at de Tombs."

Watson's face took on an expression of despair. He gazed beseechingly at the old man for several seconds, and at length begged, in a broken voice:

"But you said you would give me the money to put back?"

"So I did, an' so I will—providin' yer'll do de square t'ing."

Watson hung his head and reflected for some little time, and finally said, feebly:

"All right. It's my only chance."

"Come on, den," said the Patriarch, taking his arm, and together they left the saloon.

When Colonel Avondale reached the street the object of his search was nowhere in sight.

Nevertheless, the desperate man staggered on in the vague hope of overtaking his enemy in the course of time.

After tottering along for the distance of several blocks, however, the futility of his proceeding somehow suggested itself to even his foggy brain, and he paused to reflect.

After some thought he remembered where Marboro lived and the recollection no sooner came to him than he decided to go to his house.

He, therefore, walked as far as Broadway, and there, boarding an up-town car, was soon upon his way toward the upper end of the city.

The hour was approaching midnight.

As soon as the Patriarch had seen his young friend well upon his way in the direction of his employer's house, he left him—near Thirty-third street and Sixth avenue (the Tenderloin), and made his way toward a house in that street, not far from Seventh avenue.

Letting himself in with a pass-key, the Patriarch proceeded to the third floor, where, opening another door, he admitted himself to a flat.

Here he found, as he expected to, four of his boon companions—Edwin Paschal, otherwise the Spider, the leader of the gang; Red Regan, a notorious thug, burglar and murderer; Black Mike, an equally bad character, and a little, shrivelled-faced man, who had more the appearance of some wild animal than of a human being, who, in addition to other peculiarities, possessed an arm—the right one—which, instead of a hand, terminated in a hook-shaped horn of naked bone.

By virtue of this peculiarity he was called and known by no other soubriquet than Claw.

"Well, Patriarch," said the Spider, "what's the word?"

"Go!" was the brief reply.

"Is it all right?"

"More dan right!" grunted the old man, sinking into a chair.

"Explain," commanded the Spider. "What do you mean?"

"Yer recollect de young bloke w'ot pulled in de twenty t'ousand dis afternoon?"

"Yes," responded the Spider.

"And den had de misfortune ter lose it ag'in—some bad man robbed 'im, I'm afraid—"

"Yes, yes," interposed Paschal, impatiently. "Go on, and get to the point."

"Dat's wot I'm doin', if yer don't interrupt me. Yer see, w'en de young cove lost his wad he was kinder broke up—cause why, he'd tapped his master's till for de stake-money, an' as he knowed he'd git pinched, an' it was his first, he was dreadful put out."

"Well?"

"Wal, he come a-snifflin' 'bout et ter me, an' I finally told 'im dat I'd lend him de stuff ter put back—pervided he'd leave

de door o' his boss's house onlocked ter night."

"What good will that do us?" snarled the Spider, ill-naturedly. "We want nothing in Marboro's house."

"Yer don't understand, Spider. Don't yer see, w'en we gits inter Marboro's house our work's 'bout done, 'cause it's dead easy gittin' t'rough de wall—yer see dere's a loose panel dat I know 'bout—inter de widder's domicile."

"Ah, that's the game, is it?" cried the Spider, brightening up.

"Dat's de racket!"

"Let you alone for plotting, Patriarch!" he laughed, slapping the old man on the shoulder. "But how the deuce did you make the discovery of the secret panel?"

"Oh, I had business in de widder's house onct w'en it was occupied by O'Brien, de crack, an' de next house was occupied by a millionaire chap. Yer see, O'Brien rented de house w're de widder is now, so's ter be clost ter de millionaire cove for business purposes, an' wile his money-bags was away on his summer vacation Jimmy called in a carpenter an' had de secret panel put in so's to be more neighborly like wid de millionaire bloke. Wal, we done de job, and den Jimmy moved, but de panel's dere yit, all right, an' all we've got ter do is ter go inter Marboro's joint an' pass t'rough inter de udder ranch."

"Provided the panel has not been discovered and removed."

"No danger o' dat. It was too slick a job."

"Well, we can do no better than to chance it. If we fail in that direction, we still have the alternative of trying some other plan. But come, let us be moving,"

The party then left the flat.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIDNIGHT DEED.

Upon leaving the flat in the Tenderloin, the five rascals made their way along Thirty-third street to Sixth avenue, where it crosses Broadway.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, and, with the blaze of electric lights at this point, it seemed more like day than night.

This state of affairs evidently did not please the spider, for he scowled and glanced impatiently about, and finally muttered:

"Curse the light! Why can't we have a few friendly clouds to shield us in our work?"

"It would be better," muttered the Patriarch, "but den dis is goin' ter be sich a dead easy job dat it don't make much difference."

"One feels more secure when the skies are overcast," reflected Paschal, "and, what is better still, a little rain falling. People are inclined to attend to their own affairs of a rainy night, while on a beautiful night like this they are inclined to be inquisitive."

"Dat's right," coincided the Patriarch. "Dere' nuttin' in de bloomin' creation dat'll make a feller forgit his neighbors and look out for No. 1 so complete as misery."

During the progress of this dialogue the party had continued along Sixth avenue, and they still pursued their course in this direction until they reached Forty-fourth street, where they turned toward Fifth avenue.

About the middle of the block they paused, and the Spider said, in a subdued tone:

"I wonder if there is any chance of that young cub betraying us."

"Not de leas'," rejoined the Patriarch, confidently. "He's got too much at stake for dat. He knows dat if dere's any crooked work on his part dere won't be no sugar comin' his way, an' he's skeery of a prison."

"You think that we are safe to proceed, then, do you?"

"Dead sure."

A moment later the Patriarch turned to his pals, and his face wore an expression of satisfaction.

"It's all right, men," he said. "Come on!"

The other four hurried up the steps and Paschal opened the door.

The five men filed inside, the Spider closed the door, after which they all stopped to listen.

All was stillness in the house, and the Patriarch whispered:

"It's all right, Spider; let's git right upstairs."

"Is the secret passage on the floor above?" inquired the Spider.

"Yep."

"All right; you take the lead. Can you find your way in the dark?"

"Sure. An' if I can't, dere's dis."

And he opened the slide of a dark-lantern long enough to throw an instantaneous flash against the wall.

"Don't do that again," admonished Paschal, "until we find out whether there is anybody about or not."

"O' course not," grunted the Patriarch. "At de same time, youse don't reckon dat de young rat 'ud a left de door onlocked if dere was anybody on deck, do yer?"

"Can't tell," muttered the Spider, "and it is a great deal better to be on the safe side."

Ascending the stairs, the party was soon on the second floor, but had no more than arrived there when a door opened close by.

It was pitch dark in the hall, but a faint light which was in the room showed the outline of a human figure, the head of which was thrust out of the partly open door.

An instant of deathly silence ensued; then the Patriarch said, in a loud whisper:

"Is dat youse, Tommy?"

"Yees," came the unrestrained reply.

"Is that you, Patriarch?"

"Dat's right, Tommy," muttered the old man. "Everyting reg'lar, Tommy?"

"Everything is all right."

"No one on deck?"

"Not a soul, except me and yourself."

"An' me pals," amended the Patriarch.

"Oh, have you got somebody with you?" cried the young man, in surprise.

"Sure. Yer don't reckon I'd be comin' to do a job like this alone, do yer?"

At this juncture the Spider gave the old man an angry nudge and whispered:

"Come! let us get along, and don't stand gossiping here all night!"

With that the old man opened the slide of his lantern again and threw a brilliant glow along the hall.

Having satisfied himself with regard to his bearings, he beckoned his companions to follow, and moved along the hall to the first door, which he opened.

The room was in total darkness, and after listening until he was satisfied that there was no one present, he flashed his lantern again and proceeded to examine his surroundings.

His companions had rejoined him by this time, and the next instant a door communicating with an adjoining room opened and Tom Watson entered.

"You needn't be afraid, gentlemen," he observed, boldly. "There's not a soul on the premises, and you're perfectly safe in lighting the gas."

"No need of the gas," growled the Spider. "We are all right with the lantern, eh, Patriarch?"

"Dat's right!"

As he spoke the old man approached the wall at a certain point, and, without more ado, slid one of the panels forming the wainscoting aside.

He then placed his head within the opening and listened.

He appeared to be satisfied with the result, for he instantly moved another panel aside, which belonged to the next house, and again listened.

Then, turning to the Spider, he said:

"Come on! Leave de udders to guard dis side, an' me an' you'll do de work."

Paschal moved softly to the wall, and then ordered Red Regan, Black Mike and Claw to remain where they were and be ready to repel any attack.

By this time the Patriarch had slipped through the opening into the next house and awaited the Spider.

The latter followed his example, and the old man led the way across the room into

which they had come, and at length opened a door very softly.

The old man hesitated, and cocked his wary old ear for any sound.

There came the sound of breathing, and he nudged the Spider.

"Someun' here," he whispered. "It cain't be de widder?"

Paschal offered no suggestion, and the Patriarch flashed his light in the direction from which the sound emanated.

The sight that met their gaze caused them to start.

A beautiful young woman lay there asleep, with one white dimpled arm thrown above her head on the pillow.

But the sight had no permanent effect upon these wretches.

Paschal drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and then a phial.

Taking the cork from the phial, he quietly poured some of its contents upon the handkerchief.

He then moved cautiously to the bedside, while the old man, knowing his part well, still held the glow of his lantern so that the Spider could see to work.

The latter placed the chloroformed handkerchief over the sleeping girl's mouth and nostrils.

She awoke and struggled with all her feeble strength, but it was like that of an infant as compared to the man bending over her.

Her struggles soon ceased, and the poor creature lay, to all appearances, lifeless.

"Now do your work," he ordered, in a whisper, tiptoeing back toward where the old man was standing.

"Dat's soon done, if we don't have no interruptions."

He turned the glow of his lantern in another direction, moved it slowly about the room, and at length it fell upon an ebony cabinet inlaid with pearl.

A grin of satisfaction came over the wrinkled old face when he made this discovery, and he hastened across to the beautiful piece of furniture.

He seemed to be thoroughly acquainted with the workings of it, for, without a moment's hesitation, he pressed a small knob, whereat a small drawer shot out.

Holding the lantern down over the drawer, he lifted out a silver jewel-case, and, finding it locked, sat down his lantern, took out a large knife and pried it open.

The old man's eyes glistened as he again took up the lantern and allowed its rays to fall upon the glittering gems within.

"Ah! dere's 'em! Dem's wu'th wile, see!"

At that moment he raised his eyes from the precious prize and met those of the Spider.

"Quite a rich haul, eh, Patriarch?" commented Paschal.

"Yep," was the curt reply, as the old man slipped the case into his pocket.

"Better let me take that box," suggested the Spider.

"Never mind. I kin take keer on't till we gits back to de den."

With that he hastened out of the room, and a moment later crawled back through the panel to the other house.

Paschal meekly followed, and the old man closed the panels again.

"Now let us get out of here," said Paschal.

But, before any one had made a move, the sound of some one ascending the stairs reached their ears.

"Who the deuce can that be?" muttered the Spider.

"Probably my boss," suggested Tom Watson.

CHAPTER IV.

COVERING TRACKS.

Tom Watson was wrong in his surprise that the man ascending the stairs was Marboro, as a moment revealed.

Paschal was not to be taken by surprise, whoever the person might turn out to be, and, again saturating his handkerchief with chloroform, stood at the side of the door awaiting the newcomer.

The light had been shut off, and the rest of the gang, including young Watson, dispersed themselves about the room and waited for results.

They had not long to wait, for the next instant the door opened and in staggered Col. Bob Avondale.

He had scarcely put his head inside, however, when Paschal clutched him by the throat with one hand, while with the other he pressed the chloroformed handkerchief to the colonel's nostrils.

A lively struggle ensued, but a few moments sufficed to reduce him to insensibility.

The Spider laid his victim upon the floor, and then said:

"Now, let us get out of here. One moment. I have lost my hat."

With that he struck a match and lit the gas.

He soon recovered his hat, which had fallen off and rolled under a table during his scuffle with Avondale, and was on the point of turning off the gas again, when, to the astonishment of all the rascals, Marboro marched quietly into the room.

He was too much astonished to speak for a moment, and cast his eyes wildly about the room from one face to another, and at length they fell upon the unconscious man on the floor.

Turning deathly pale, he gasped:

"My God! What does this mean?"

Then appearing to notice Paschal for the first time, he cried:

"Edwin Paschal! What are you doing here?" and without allowing the robber time to answer, he cast another frightened glance toward the prostrate man, and continued, in a terrified voice:

"Murder! Edwin Paschal, this is your work!"

"Well, suppose it is? What are you going to do about it?"

"Do about it? I'll show you what I shall do about it."

With that he made a step toward an alcove leading off the room.

Paschal took a hasty glance in the direction, and in the dim light he could see that there was both a telephone and a police call on the wall.

Hastily stepping in front of him Paschal said, in a low, firm voice:

"No, you don't, my friend! Not this time!"

"What do you mean? Let me pass, or it will be the worse for you, Edwin Paschal!"

"No, you don't," rejoined the Spider, coolly. "I should be a pretty sort of an ass to allow you to send in a police call on me while I was standing looking at you, wouldn't I?"

"Let me pass, I tell you! If you don't let me pass, curse you, I'll—"

But he got no further.

As he had spoken he had made a pass at the robber's head.

The latter dodged the blow and, stooping, picked up Avondale's pistol from the floor, where he had dropped it.

The next instant he raised the weapon and fired.

"Take that, curse you! That is what you get for meddling in affairs that don't concern you!"

Marboro had sunk lifeless to the floor.

The Patriarch stepped forward and looked down at the fallen man, and then stooped over him and examined his pulse.

"Dis is bad business, Spider. Yer hadn't orter done dat. It's a goin' a leetle too far."

Paschal, who had become cool enough by this time to realize what he had done, grew very white and began to tremble violently.

"Is—is he dead?"

"He'll never be no deader," responded the old man, coolly.

"My God! What is to be done?"

"Dere's nuttin' ter be done now, but ter git out. Stay! Yes, dere's one ting."

"What is that?"

"Gimme de gun!"

The Spider, with trembling hand, handed him over the revolver.

"Jes' wot I t'ought," growled the Patriarch, examining the weapon. "Colonel Bob's gun! W'e're did yer find it?"

"On the floor, there!"

"Dat's all right, den," mused the old man, tossing the pistol upon the floor close to where Avondale lay.

"What do you mean?" queried the Spider, breathlessly.

"Can't yer guess?"

"You don't mean to—"

"Yer didn't hear de quarrel atween them chaps in de Park Row saloon, did yer?"

"No; I knew there was bad blood between them, but—"

"Yer didn't hear Colonel Bob threaten Marboro's life, and see him leave de gin mill wid de gun in his hand, swearin' dat he'd shoot him on sight?"

"No. Did he do that?" cried Paschal, rapturously.

"Dat's right!"

"Who saw and heard him?"

"Everybody! De place was full o' men, and dey all seen an' heered w'ot I tell yer."

"I see," cried the Spider, ecstatically. "We'll leave the pistol there, where it will be found by the police, and, as Avondale will also be found here, there will be a case for somebody."

"Oh, yer do tumble at las', do you? I kinder t'ought yer never would!"

"Yes, I see the point, Patriarch," responded the Spider, somewhat crest-fallen. "But, let us get out of here before somebody else comes in upon us."

The gang then hurried out of the place, the Spider remaining to the last to turn out the light.

Tommy Watson accompanied the robbers, as he was afraid to remain in his master's house after what had occurred.

They were scarcely out of the room when an old servant, the only living occupant of the house, and who had been awakened by the pistol shot, came tottering in with a candle in his hand.

"What was that noise, I wonder?" he muttered, holding the candle aloft and looking about. "I was sure I heard a pistol shot. But maybe it was across the street. They're always cutting up over there. What's this? Uh!"

As he spoke his foot had struck against something, nearly tripping him up, and, looking down, he was horrified to behold what he supposed to be the dead body of Avondale.

"Gracious Heaven!" he exclaimed. "It's Colonel Bob, and—and—it can't be that he's dead, I reckon?"

After some hesitation the old servant plucked up sufficient courage to stoop down and examine the colonel.

After examining his pulse and placing his hand over his heart, the old man muttered:

"No, he isn't dead. I must get him up."

With that the old man put the candle down upon the table and set to work trying to arouse the unconscious man.

"Colonel Bob!" he shouted, shaking him vigorously. "Colonel Bob! Come! Wake up! You must go home!"

After a good deal of vigorous shaking, the colonel at length began to show indications of animation, and soon began to mutter.

"Uh!" he muttered. "W'as matter? W'as up? Where am I?"

"You're here, sir, in Mr. Marboro's house."

"What! In that scoundrel's house? Then I must get out, for if he and I meet one of us must die!"

And with a superhuman effort he regained his feet.

But, when he had done so, he grew blind, the room swam before him, and he would have reeled to the floor had not the old servant caught him and settled him into a chair.

"You must go home, Colonel Bob," repeated the old servant. "The master will soon be home, now, and you know you are not friends."

"Friends? No! We are enemies—deadly enemies."

"Then, sir, you had better go before he comes."

"Yes, yes," mumbled Avondale, who was beginning to grow drowsy again.

"I'll go, but let me rest a moment—just a moment, I'm so tired—tired."

"Very well, sir, but you had better not rest too long. I'll leave the light here for you. Good night, sir."

"Good night, Duncan."

The old servant had been gone but a moment when the colonel seemed suddenly to remember where he was, and sprang to his feet.

"No, no," he muttered, "I must not remain here. I must get out and go home. If that man comes in—if that man comes in—"

He paused, swayed about, and at length proceeded:

"And yet—I came here to kill him. That was what I left the saloon for. But, after all, it would be hardly right to commit that act in his own house. Uh! What's this?"

During his colloquy he had staggered about the room until he had at length stumbled over the murdered man's body.

"Who is it?" he gasped, stooping over to peer into the dead man's face. "My God!" he shrieked at length. "It is Marboro, and I—no, no, it could not have been—"

Here he bent over and placed his hand over the prostrate man's heart.

"Dead! Dead! Horrors! What's this?" he gasped, jumping to his feet and looking at his hand. "Blood! My God! Can it be—"

His eyes wandered wildly about the room, and at length fell upon the revolver lying on the floor.

He snatched it up hastily and examined it.

"Yes, yes," he groaned; "mine, and two chambers empty. Merciful Heavens! I have killed him! I am a murderer!"

CHAPTER V.

COMPARING NOTES.

"Dat was a purty slick job, takin' it all togedder, Spider," observed the Patriarch, with a self-satisfied chuckle when the five rascals were again in their den, seated about a table, drinking and smoking.

"Very well done," growled the Spider. "But let us have a look at those diamonds."

"Sartin, my dear friend," answered the Patriarch, blandly. "But it makes me laugh w'en I t'ink how slick we turned matters onto Colonel Bob. He'll t'ink he killed Marboro, and's like as not, confess, like de chump dat he is."

Spider shuddered.

"You do not think there is any chance of them tracing the crime to me, do you?" he gasped.

"I don't t'ink so," mused the old man, "unless dat young cove splits."

"Great Scott! Do you think there is any chance of that?"

"Cain't tell. Dese young ducks is hard to trust. He may keep mum, and den ag'in, he may split. Yer see, it looks kinder bad him a-givin' us de sneak as soon's I give him de five hundred plunks."

"Why did you not wait till you got here, you old fool?" sneered Paschal. "You might have known he would give us the slip as soon as he got the money."

"Wal, you see, I'd promised it as soon as he done de square t'ing in openin' de door, an' I always like ter keep me word wid a young'n, 'speshly w'en he keeps his'n. I'd be settin' a bad example for youth fer an old codger like me ter break my word."

"Exceedingly conscientious, you are, all at once," sneered the Spider. "I have never noticed that you were over scrupulous about breaking your promise in the dealings I have had with you."

"Oh, wid youse? Dat's different. Youse is old enough ter look out fer No. 1."

"That is all very well, Patriarch, but, look you, if that young fellow splits, I shall hold you responsible for it."

"Dat's w'ot de cove said w'en de gent pointed a pistol at him; he said, 'You just shoot, and if you kill me, I'll hold yer responsible.' But, jokin' aside, Spider, I don't really b'lieve de young bloke 'll dare to give de game away."

"Don't you, really?" exclaimed Paschal, hopefully.

"No. Yer see, de young'n' is dead stuck on bein' a game sport, an' a dead game sport is a first cousin to a dead game crook—"

"Except that the crook is not quite so bad," interposed the Spider.

"No; de crook is more apt ter be honest an' square, an' can tell de truth once in a while. But, w'ot I was goin' ter say is, dat, as de young chap's dead set on bein' a sport, he'll not be long in blowing de five hundred plunks on de races, now dat his boss has croaked, an' as soon's dat's gone he'll come ter me for more—"

"And get it, too," interrupted the Spider, in a bitter tone.

"W'y will he git it?"

"Because he has the knowledge of that killing to hold over us. Oh, what a precious fool I was to allow my temper to get the better of my judgment! I could easily have restrained the fellow from giving the alarm by knocking him down, and no great harm would have been done."

"'Cept addin' anudder witness to—"

"Oh, yes, I had nearly forgotten," interposed the Spider, suddenly. "I believe I asked you to let me see those diamonds, Patriarch?"

"Oh, de diamonds!" cried the old man, in a well-simulated tone of surprise. "Dat's so, we was a-speakin' 'bout dem. It's funny how a feller's mind will slip away from a t'ing sometimes. It's jist like tryin' ter git up to a pump wid ice around it, de closer yer git de furder yer git away."

"Will you hand out those diamonds?" yelled the Spider, with rising rage. "I'll have no more of your cursed dallying! Hand them out at once, or I'll—"

"W'y, sart'in, my dear friend," grinned the old man. "But w'ot's de good o' bein' in such a hurry? Dis hurryin' an' gittin' agytated kills more folks dan cholery an' smallpox put togedder. Yer see," he went on, "w'en folks gits agytated dere's a kinder of a combustion of de hypergastric spondoolix, an' de lymphatic interregnum of de os frantis becomes complicated wid de oleomargerine—"

"Thunder and Mars!" yelled the Spider. "How long am I to sit here listening to this infernal drivell? Now, do you hand out those diamonds forthwith, or, by the eternal, I'll throttle you!"

"W'y, sure, my dear friend," responded the Patriarch, in the most unperturbed manner possible. "Do yer know, dat was w'ot I was jes' on de p'nt o' doin'?"

"Now, let me have those diamonds, that's a good fellow."

"W'y, o' course. W'en yer speaks gentle, like dat, Spider, yer teches de old man's heart, an' he cain't refuse yer nuttin'. Do you know, I allus was a susceptible sort o' chap. W'en I was a kid, an' me mudder wanted me ter do suthin' w'ot I didn't wanter, all she hed ter do was ter say, 'Now, deary, if yer don't do dis er dat, yer'll break yer pore old mudder's heart,' w'y say, Spider, I'd a done it den or bu'sted a suspender! Yer see, I allus was—"

At this juncture the Spider hastily approached the table, struck it a sounding blow with his fist, and roared:

"Hand out those diamonds, you cursed old scoundrel, or, by Heaven! I'll throttle you on the spot!"

The old man looked up beseechingly, but not in the least perturbed, and said in a plaintive voice:

"Now, Spider, my dear friend, why will you agytate yerself so? Don't yer know dat—"

But he got no further, for at that moment Paschal clutched him by the throat so firmly as to shut off his breath.

"Now, curse you! perhaps you will stop that infernal prattle and do what I tell you! Produce those—"

But he, too, was prevented from finishing his sentence, for at that moment Claw sprang up from the table, hooked the heavy crook at the end of his right arm onto the Spider's neck, and gave him such a jerk as to almost dislocate that important member of his body, and at the same time lacerate the flesh to such an extent that a stream of blood spurted out over the robber's shirt front.

"Jes' let up on dat, see!" muttered Claw. "Nobody don't do nuttin' ter der Pat-ryarch w'ile I'm 'round. Ketch on?"

"Curse you, you infernal ape!" roared Paschal, relaxing his grip on the old man and turning upon Claw. "I'll brain you for that!"

And he aimed a terrific blow at the wizened little man with his fist. But before the blow had reached its destination the Spider lay sprawled upon the floor from a blow from the fist of Red Regan.

"There now, ye murtherin' divvil o' the wurrold!" muttered Regan; "take that for yer bad manners!"

But Paschal was upon his feet in an instant. His black eyes flashed like torches, and, grinding his teeth like a wild animal, he drew his revolver.

His face wore an expression of cool determination, and there was no question but that he meant destruction. Every man of the group realized this, and, jumping to his feet, put himself on the defensive.

There was a moment of dreadful silence, and then every one was startled by a vigorous rap at the door.

The Spider turned deadly pale and concealed his revolver.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DETECTIVE.

Thaddeus Burr, the famous detective, had, for the first time in many a long day, found himself with a little spare time on his hands, and had improved the opportunity by calling upon some very dear friends who resided in Forty-fourth street, just east of Fifth avenue.

Upon his return he walked through Forty-fourth street, intending to take a down-town car at Sixth avenue.

In passing a house in about the middle of the block between Fifth and Sixth avenues, he was a little surprised at seeing a man emerge, run down the stoop, and dodge across to the opposite side of the street, which was extremely dark, and disappear in the dense shadow.

There was a wild, haunted look in the man's face, and a general hunted skulking in his action that stamped him, in the eyes of the detective, as but one thing—

A murderer!

"There can be no doubt about it," mused Thad, pausing and glancing up at the house from which the mysterious man had emerged, "and his victim must be in this house."

Looking up at the windows, he saw that the house was in total darkness.

There was not even a light in the hall, which was somewhat surprising, as in most houses the hall light is kept burning all night, unless the family was absent.

"That is not strange in this case, however," reflected the detective, "as the murderer, doubtless, preferred to have total darkness in which to do his hideous work. I'll just see what I can find out about this affair."

So saying, or musing rather, Thad mounted the stoop and rang the door-bell.

There was no response, and he repeated the ring.

But the operation had to be repeated many times before he was able to arouse any one.

He was on the point of abandoning the job, and had just told himself that the murderer, if such he was, had made a clean job of it, when he was gratified to hear the sound of some one stirring inside.

A moment later the door was opened a few inches, a scared face appeared, and a timid voice asked:

"Is that you, Master Marboro?"

"No, it is not Master Marboro," replied Thad, "but a friend of his, and I desire to see the gentleman."

"You can't see him now, sir," mumbled old Duncan (for he it was), "because master hasn't got home yet. I don't see what is keeping him out so late, sir, for he said he would be home by twelve at the latest, and here it is going on two."

"Who was that that left the house just now?"

"I know of no one leaving the house just now."

"A tall man, with a pointed beard and dressed in a gray suit."

"Oh, that must have been Colonel Bob."

Avondale, I reckon. He was here a while ago."

"What was he doing here? Is he a friend of your master?"

"No, no—that is, they used to be the warmest of friends, but they had a falling out some years ago, about a lady, I think, and they have not been friends since. In fact, they have been—"

"I see," interrupted Thad; "enemies. The same old story. Now tell me, if these men were deadly enemies, what was Colonel Bob, as you call him, doing in this house?"

"He was—was—I hardly know, sir, what he was doing here. The fact is, Colonel Bob was in his cups somewhat, sir, and it may be, sir—"

"I understand," interposed the detective again; "in his cups, he got to rankling over his real or imaginary wrongs, and concluded to come round and pick a quarrel with him. Are you quite sure that your master is not in the house?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Did you admit this man—Colonel Bob?"

"No, sir. When I discovered him he was in the parlor up-stairs, asleep."

"In bed?"

"No, sir. On the floor."

"This is very strange."

"So it is, sir."

"But how the deuce did he get in?"

"That's what puzzles me, sir. I was careful to see that the latch was on the street door before I went to bed, knowing that there was nobody to come in but master and his clerk, Mr. Watson, and they both carry latch-keys."

"Are you three the only occupants of the house?"

"To-night—yes, sir. There's the cook and the housekeeper, but they are both away to-night."

"So that there was nobody else to let the man in?"

"No, sir."

"Stay. You spoke of the clerk—Watson, I think you said his name is—has he come in yet?"

"No, sir. But I am not so much surprised at that, as he's a somewhat of a wild young fellow, and frequently stays out late—often not coming in at all."

Thad was almost satisfied, and was on the point of proceeding on his way, when the image of that wild, haunted face floated before him again, sending a strange thrill to his heart, and he at once determined to probe the mystery a little further.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, old man, but I am a detective, and after what I have seen and heard, I think it will be necessary for me to look into the matter further. I shall, therefore, have to ask you to let me look through the house."

Old Duncan hesitated, and then said:

"I'm quite sure, sir, that you will have your trouble for nothing—that you will find things just as I told you; but, if you are a detective, I suppose I have no right to deny you admission."

Just at that instant a new thought came to the detective, and instead of stopping to discuss his right of entrance to the house, he said:

"If I am not mistaken, you told me a while ago that you had already gone to bed previous to your discovery of Colonel Bob in the parlor. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir. I had been in bed some time, and had had my first nap, when—"

"How did you happen to get up and go into the parlor, then?"

"Why, you see, sir, as I say, I had had my first nap, and was dozing off again, and I suppose I must have been dreaming, but I was certain I heard a pistol-shot, and it seemed to me that it was in the vicinity of the parlor. I got up, and went into the parlor, where I suddenly stumbled upon something, and, looking down, saw that it was Colonel Bob."

"I was dreadfully startled, sir, as you may think, for I thought he was dead; but when I came to examine him, I found that he was only asleep—but oh! so sound asleep! I thought I should never be able to wake him, sir, but I finally succeeded, and got him up into a chair, and then I left him and returned to bed."

"But the pistol-shot?"

"Oh, as I said, I am sure that was only in my dream, or, perhaps, some noise in the street."

"At any rate, I feel that I shall not be doing my duty if I do not investigate this matter further, so stand aside and let me in."

The old man offered no further resistance, and the detective walked into the hall.

"I guess we will go to the parlor first," the street door. "Light this hall lamp so that we can see our way up-stairs."

Old Duncan meekly obeyed, and the hall and stairs were soon brightly illuminated, and Thad mounted the stairs.

He waited on the first landing for the old servant to come and open the door, and, as soon as he had entered the parlor, which was in total darkness, the detective struck a match and lighted one burner of the chandelier.

It took but a hasty glance about the room for him to discover what his detective instinct had already warned him he would find—the body of the murdered man.

"Ah!" he soliloquized aloud, "I thought my nose could not be entirely at fault. So this was the result of the old man's dream pistol-shot? Egad! it must have been a nightmare!"

His soliloquy was interrupted at this point by a groan from old Duncan, who had followed him to the spot, and was peering, with a scared face, down at the ghastly spectacle on the floor.

"My God!" groaned the old man, "it's Master Marboro! That must have been what I heard."

CHAPTER VII. A NEW MEMBER.

The gang of rascals stood staring with scared faces toward the door, after hearing the knock, and not one of them had either the courage to open the door or bid the newcomer enter.

And when the knock was repeated, it only had the effect of increasing their terror.

I say not one. Yes, there was one who was not disturbed, and that was the Patriarch, who had still remained sitting through all the scrimmage which had passed, and he now remained in his place, watching with an amused expression the terror and consternation of his companions.

At length, after the knock had been repeated for the third time, he arose and, after a sardonic chuckle, said:

"Wal, of all de brave critters, s'elp me, I never seen yer ekal outside of a sheepen!"

So saying, he walked to the door and opened it.

Tommy Watson stood there.

"Hullo, Tommy, me Juneberry. How air ye? Come right in an' warm yerself, as de devil said to de murderer. How've yer bin?"

"Oh, so, so. How's it with yerself, Patriarch?"

"Oh, 'live and kickin'. Sit down, young feller."

But Tommy evidently did not feel sufficiently at his ease to sit.

He glanced about at the repulsive faces which, in turn, regarded him with anything but expressions of admiration, and the longer he gazed the less comfortable he appeared to feel.

"By de way," interjected the Patriarch, just noticing the young man's embarrassment. "I fergot dat yer wasn't acquainted with der gents. Dis is Mr. Watson, Spider, in de fucher ter be called de Rat, 'cause he squealed w'en he got in a tight place."

"It's to be hoped that he is not in the habit of splitting as well as squealing," growled the Spider, regarding the newcomer with decided disfavor.

Tommy looked at him with a puzzled expression, but said nothing.

"Oh, dere's no fear o' dat chap, Spider," interposed the Patriarch. "I'll bet me gizzard he's as true as steel, and'll hold secrets widout leakin' as a good jug will hold tanglefoot. And dis," pur-

sued the old man, indicating another member of the gang, "is our good friend, Red Regan, an' dis gent is Black Mike, an' dis little dried-up critter dat looks like a stale herring, we calls him by de ufonious name o' Claw. And now yer knows de whole band."

A dead silence followed his series of introductions, and all the members of the gang had slunk into seats, one after another, and it was noticed that none of them, except the Spider, had greeted the newcomer with any sort of recognition whatever, unless a black scowl and a disdainful shrug of the shoulders could be called such.

The silence continued for some moments, when the Patriarch broke in again:

"Say, wot's de matter wid youse chaps? Yer all as glum as boiled clams. Are yer huffy 'cause de new member's among us?"

"Oi don't look on him as a mimbah at all at all," put in Red Regan. "It's no way o' doin', be the powers, bringin' strangers among us loike that, so it ain't!"

"There yez hit the nail on the head, me b'y," interjected Black Mike. "Wid this koind av goin's on, the lot av us'll soon be hangin' be the neck—be me troth, we will!"

"W'ot's de good o' de kid, anyway?" sneered Claw, with a contemptuous shrug. "We don't want no pink-fingered dudes in dis gang. See?"

The Spider blew out a long puff of smoke from his cigar and sighed.

"Oh, youse fellers is jealous, dat's all," growled the Patriarch. "Yer jealous: 'cause yer not as good lookin' as me young friend, dat's de rub. An' as for peachin' or splittin', dere ain't one o' yer dat I'd trust no furder dan him."

"I think myself that it was a little injudicious to bring him among us," interposed the Spider, "but now that he is here, I suppose we'll have to make the best of it."

"Not necessary at all, gentlemen," said Watson, jumping to his feet and placing himself in a dignified attitude before them. "I've always made it a rule never to remain where I wasn't welcome. Good-night, gentlemen."

With that he strode toward the door.

But, before he had time to open it, the Spider stepped with agility in front of him, took hold of the door-knob, and said, in a calm voice:

"Not so fast, young man! You may not be welcome here—indeed, I am quite satisfied that you are not, but as you are here, you will have to remain until such time as we give you permission to go. You are in possession of certain secrets of ours which it would not be wise or judicious for us to allow you to carry away. It will therefore be necessary for us to hold you until we have decided what disposition to make of you."

Poor Tommy turned deathly pale.

"Oh, Lord!" he gasped. "If I'd known that I wouldn't have come here!"

"It would probably have been better," rejoined Paschal. "By the way, why did you come?"

"Because I promised the Patriarch that I would, and I thought if I did not come you would suspect me of treachery."

"Then you have no intention of divulging what you saw to-night?"

"Not if I was hanged for it!"

"That sounds very well," sneered the Spider, "but let me ask you how did you find your way up here? Who told you where to come?"

"I told 'im how to find de way," explained the Patriarch, which was untrue, but he saw that the boy would never be able to answer satisfactorily.

"You did?" roared the Spider, turning furiously upon the old man.

"I did."

"Have you taken leave of your senses entirely, or are you determined to ruin us? Do you not know that it is one of our most rigid laws that the location of this place is to be given to no outsider?"

"Dat's right, Spider, I know dat, and I ain't took no leave of absence of my senses, as I knows on. But dis chap is no outsider, recollect. We virtooly made

him one on us w'en we took him inter our confidence."

This was a clincher, and the Spider had no more to say.

"Now, as he done de square t'ing dat time, it stands ter reason dat he'll do it right along. He's in persession of our secret, an' dere's no gittin' round dat, an' it remains for youse gents ter say whedder ye'll let him in furder, or push him out now and trust to his honor not to split on us wid w'ot he already knows."

"If Oi has anything to say, we'll do nayther," growled Red Regan.

"There yez air roight, me b'y," put in Black Mike. "We'll do nayther, be gob."

"Dat's right, see?" added Claw.

"W'ot would yer do wid 'im?" asked the Patriarch.

"Oh, dere's lots o' t'ings ter do wid 'm," growled Claw.

"There yez air roight, me b'y," said Black Mike. "We got rid av wan witness to-night, an' it's a mighty aisy job gittin' rid av another."

"Youse'd be fer killin' de poor bloke, den, would yer?" interposed the Patriarch.

"That's roight," cried Black Mike.

"Wal, w'en yer come ter dat, yer'll have more'n one ter put away, me flannel-mouthed friend!" said the old man, grimly.

"D'yez mane to say dat yez'd interfere, sor?"

"I would, an' don't yer forgit it!"

"Sure, an' it's gittin' mighty tinder-hearted yez air," growled Red Regan, disdainfully. "It's the loikes av yez that'll be joinin' the Salvayshun Airmy nixt."

"Now, if our young friend here desires to become a member of our band," interposed Spider, "I am sure we can trust him. On the other hand, if he does not wish to become a member, he is at liberty to go in peace, but I must warn him now that his life will be in danger from the moment he leaves this room."

Poor Watson was very pale, and had begun to tremble as if he had been seized with an ague.

"W'ot's the word, me boy?" asked the Patriarch, encouragingly. "Air ye wid us?"

Watson hesitated a moment, and then said:

"I'd like to join you, gentlemen, if you think you can welcome me into your ranks, and I am quite sure you will never have cause to regret that you placed so much confidence in me."

"Dat's de stuff!" cried the Patriarch, "and spoke like a parson. Give us yer flipper, me lad!"

The old man grasped Tom's hand warmly, and then said:

"De nex' t'ing's ter 'minister de oath, an' 'nishiate yer. Red Regan, you an' Mike better do dis."

The two ruffians arose from their seats and approached, doggedly.

"The yoosyal racket, Oi s'pose?" said Regan.

"No, that will not be necessary," interposed the Spider, in a kindly voice. "I have taken a fancy to this young man, and don't propose that he shall be subjected to the rough treatment."

"Oh, we'll trate him as gentle as a lamb, sor," promised Red Regan, with a knowing wink at his pals. "Come on, young man."

And poor Tom was led, pale and trembling, from the room to receive the rites of initiation.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TRIFLE LATE.

Thad was perplexed. He felt confident that the old servant's story about finding Colonel Bob asleep was a tissue of falsehoods, concocted by the perpetrator of the crime, and put into the mouth of the garrulous old man for the purpose of throwing the authorities off the track, and yet there was a note of sincerity in the old fellow's tone and attitude that was difficult to get over.

He gazed down on the pleading old man, with his bent head of thin gray hair, and at length his feelings got the better of him, and he said:

"Get up, sir. It is not for me to say whether you are telling the truth or not; that is between your God and yourself. I hope, for your sake, that you are, but if you are not, it will come out sooner or later."

The servant arose, the tears still streaming down over his wrinkled cheeks.

"Oh, sir," he cried, raising his palsied old hands toward Heaven, "I know the truth will one day come out, and, when it does, it will be found to be just as I have told you."

"I hope so, and for the present I am constrained to believe you. But now tell me, where does this Colonel Bob live?"

"I have not the least idea, sir. You see, Colonel Bob was a wealthy man once, and then he got to gambling and betting on the races and lost everything. When he was in good circumstances he lived on the avenue here in one of its grandest houses, and then when he began to go down he had to give up his fine house, and then he disappeared, and none of his old friends knew where he moved to, although it was rumored that he had taken a flat somewhere."

"How long is it since he left the avenue?"

"About a year, I think, sir."

"Not longer than that?"

"I do not think it is more than that, sir."

"Still, that may be long enough for his name to get into the directory. Have you a directory here, my good man?"

"Yes, sir. Just wait a moment and I shall fetch it."

And away ran the old man, and soon returned with the book desired.

"Avondale," mused Thad, turning over the leaves. "A-m, a-t, a-v, a-v-o-n, yes, here we are—Avondale, Eightieth street. That's my man, and that is his domicile—or I'm much mistaken. Now, it won't take me long to reach there. But, stay, I must stop and notify the police of this affair, so that they can take care of the corpse."

"Here's a telephone, sir," said the old servant, pointing in the direction of the alcove, where the instrument hung. "That may save you some troubie."

"So it will, a great deal of trouble."

With that he went to the telephone, called up Police Headquarters and notified them of what had happened.

He then hurried out of the house, and as soon as he reached the street, hailed the first cab he came across, jumped in, and was soon whirling away in the direction of Colonel Bob's flat, taking in on the way the residence of a police justice, where he procured a warrant.

When Avondale got outside of Marboro's house he dodged across to the darkest side of the street and slunk along, avoiding the light, turning up this dark street and again down that, twisting and turning in every direction—haunted with the constant delusion that he was being followed, and believing that every man he met knew his secret. Indeed, acting as any murderer, which he believed himself to be, would have acted.

Finally, after a long, weary journey, he reached the building in which his flat was located, and then he hesitated about going up.

"How can I ever face her?" he mused, bitterly. "It was not enough that I should have made a pauper of her, but now I must make her the wife of a murderer! My God! Why did I not die before I ever met her, that she might have been saved this infamy—this terrible affliction? But I must not remain here. They will soon be upon me. I must go somewhere? Why not home?"

At length he plucked up sufficient courage and climbed the stairs to his flat.

It was not far from daylight, but his wife was still waiting up for him.

She rushed at him when he entered with the impetuosity of a true and loving wife.

"At last!" she cried, ecstatically. "Oh, Robert, I am so glad you have come! I was so fearful that something had happened to you!"

Avondale shuddered and put out his hands to keep her away from him.

"Don't come near me, don't touch me! I am not worthy to be touched by so pure an angel as you! I am a murderer!"

"No, no, no! You are not, my dear. You must not talk that way. You only imagine that what you say is true. Your head is bad again, dear!"

"Then listen, love."

He paused and looked about to make sure that nobody was within earshot.

"We are quite alone, dear," she assured him.

"Listen!" he repeated, grasping his wife's arm and speaking in a frightened manner. "I was at the saloon—the cursed saloon—I had bet my last dollar on 'Handisap,' and lost. I was desperate. I thought of you and our child, and of how I had brought you to beggary, and I was desperate—mad at my own folly—my own villainy. My head was in a whirl and my soul was on fire, when what should happen, but—"

"What, dear?" she asked, anxiously.

"He came in—"

"Who, dear?"

"You know?"

"You don't mean?—"

"Yes, Fred Marboro. You know the sight of him always irritates me at all times, but in my present condition it nearly drove me mad."

"But the scoundrel was not content with thrusting his detestable presence upon me—he must needs come up and speak to me in that mock-cordial way of his."

"I ordered him out of my sight, and then he must needs add insult to injury by using your name—your pure, sweet name, Nellie, in such a place."

"This was more than I could bear, and I drew my revolver and fired."

"And killed him?" gasped his wife, covering her face with her hands.

"No—providentially, my hand was too shaky at that time, and I missed him; but I was not to be foiled."

"He had left the saloon, and I followed him. I recollect nothing more. The next I remember was being aroused by his servant. I had been asleep on the floor—"

"In his house?" she interrupted.

"Yes, love, in his parlor."

"How did that happen?"

"I do not know—I cannot understand it."

"Well, when I became conscious and realized that I was under his roof I determined to get out as quickly as possible. But when I arose to my feet I could scarcely stand and staggered all about the room, and finally tripped upon the dead body of—Oh, my God! I see it yet! There it is! The ghastly face, the wide-open eyes, looking up into mine, and accusing me, cursing me, branding me as a murderer!"

And the stricken man sank down upon a chair, buried his face in his hands and sobbed like a child.

His wife hurried to his side, put her arm about his neck and spoke in a brave, encouraging voice:

"No, no, my love! You must not give up. I do not believe you are guilty. There is some mistake—some dreadful mystery about it. The fact of your being unconscious tells me that. Some wicked enemy has played a cruel trick upon you for the purpose of screening his own crime."

"Oh, God!" he groaned, "if I could only believe that! But no. I was already a murderer in the sight of Heaven before I fired the fatal shot."

"I do not—I cannot believe it!"

"Then look at the proof," he said, jumping up and taking his pistol from his pocket. "This was on the floor beside me. Look! Two chambers empty, the one I fired in the saloon and the other—"

"Then, my love, you must not remain here," she cried, with sudden energy. "Whether guilty or not, they will be on

your track. They may be at the door at this very instant."

"Let them come and take me. It is what I deserve. I am ready to receive punishment for my crime."

"No, no, you must—you shall not! Think of your wife and child! It will be better to be a refugee from justice than to die an ignominious death. The disgrace will be less; besides, you know, while there is life there is hope."

Avondale reflected a moment, and then taking his wife in his arms, said:

"Sure, you are right. I will go. But where?"

"Anywhere—to Canada—I have it. My brother's clothes—his sailor uniform—is here. I will get them for you. Put them on, go to the nearest seaport outside of New York and enlist. Keep out of sight for a while, and I am sure things will come out all right."

"I shall do as you say, love. Get me the clothes."

They hurried into another room, where Colonel Bob was given the valise containing his brother-in-law's sailor clothes.

"I shall not stop to put them on now. I can do that at some other place. If I wait to do it here, it may be too late. Good-by, Nellie. God keep and protect you and the child."

He snatched a hasty kiss and was about to hurry away, when there was a ring at the bell.

CHAPTER IX.

ON A HOT SCENT.

The instant Thad reached the house in which Avondale's flat was located, he sprang out of the cab, ran up the stoop, and, luckily finding the vestibule door open, examined the names on the letter-boxes by the light of a match.

It was at that extremely dark hour which just precedes the dawn, and the hall lamp had been turned out.

At length he found what he sought.

"Robt. W. Avondale," he read, on a tiny card stuck into the slot made for that purpose in the letter-box. "That is my man, and, unless he is a pretty slick one, I shall soon have him in a safe place. That will be a good one on the superintendent, catching the murderer almost as soon as news of the crime is received at headquarters."

With that he rang the bell.

The door was promptly opened, and he entered and made his way to the fourth floor.

Here he found the door of the flat open and a woman standing at it.

"Ah!" he reflected, "this is rather suspicious. A trifle too eager to receive me. They are planning to give me a bluff; but I guess they'll find this bird is a little too old to be caught with chaff."

Here he approached and addressed the woman.

"Does Colonel Robert Avondale live here?"

"He does," was the calm answer.

"Ah! I'm sorry to disturb you at such an hour, madam, but I am desirous of seeing the colonel. Is he within?"

"He is not."

"Has he not been home since—"

"Since when?" she promptly asked, but without a suspicious tremor in her voice.

"Since—since—" he faltered; "to-night, I mean?"

"Oh, yes. You do not suppose that my husband stays out all night, do you?"

"Certainly not," he answered, apologetically. "I only wondered that, having been at home, he should be out so early, that is all."

"Oh, my husband has business which takes him away very early."

"I have no doubt," said Thad, sarcastically, "especially this morning."

"Yes," she replied, with remarkable simplicity; "this morning especially."

"Well, madam, I must inform you that I am a detective, that I have a warrant for your husband's arrest, and that it will be necessary for me to search the house."

"With pleasure," returned Mrs. Avondale, with great politeness. "Come right in."

Thad entered, not, it must be confessed,

without some misgivings, for he did not like the woman's politeness. He was too experienced a detective not to see that there was something behind it.

She showed him into the parlor, thence into the two little bedrooms, in one of which he noticed an infant sleeping in a crib.

The sight touched the great, tender-hearted detective.

He could not dispel the picture of desolation which the arrest of this man for murder would bring about.

But the succeeding instant the iron master, Duty, stepped in, and the detective felt that sentiment would have to be banished.

He prosecuted his search from that out with less heart, however, and was almost glad at the conclusion that his man had not been found.

When he returned to the parlor and turned to speak to the woman, he was impressed with two things.

First, with her quiet, womanly beauty, and, second, with her bravery and coolness, the latter of which he felt was assumed in the face of the most trying circumstances.

The fact that she was screening a breaking heart beneath a calm, smiling face was not lost upon him.

"This has been a very painful ordeal for me, madam," he said, and his tone told her more plainly than his words that he spoke truly. "But such is the nature of my profession that I am frequently compelled to perform exceedingly unpleasant duties. This does not prevent me from according the greatest sympathy to those in affliction, especially gentle natures like your own."

"Oh, thank you, sir," she answered, feelingly. "I realized that you were a gentleman, and it is pleasant to meet those who can sympathize with us in our affliction."

"You have my perfect sympathy, madam, and for that reason I am not sorry that I did not succeed in finding your husband here, and also why I did not mention the charge upon which he is accused."

"It was not necessary," she replied, in a matter-of-fact tone, "as I know already."

This was a genuine surprise for the detective.

"You did?"

"Certainly," she answered, in the same cool manner.

"Ah, I couldn't have imagined it. It has been so recent, you know. Er—how, may I ask, did you learn—"

"My husband told me."

"But, of course, he denies the truth of it, and—and—you believe him innocent?"

"On the contrary, he declares that he is guilty, and, never having known him to tell an untruth, I can but believe him."

"This is most extraordinary."

And it was so remarkable, indeed, that he was forced to examine the woman's face once more to see if he could not discern some trace of finesse or deception there, but a single glance was sufficient to convince him that she was as honest as the day is long.

"And, knowing him to be guilty," he ventured, after some reflection, "you cunived to spirit him away so that I could not catch him, did you?"

"Certainly. Why should I not?"

"But he was here when I first came in?"

"I believe he was," she admitted.

"That is one on me. I don't blame you. You are a brave, noble woman, and, believe me, whatever comes to him, you will always find a friend in me. Good-by."

She gave her hand, and the great detective shook it warmly.

"Good-by, sir. I hope you may be as unsuccessful in your future search as you have been here."

"I shall not be much grieved if I do. Still, I must do my duty. But you must keep up a good heart."

And he hurried away.

The moment the door closed upon him, Helen Avondale sank down upon a chair beside a table, buried her face in her hands, and gave vent to the torrent of

grief which was tearing her poor heart to atoms.

When she had intimated to the detective that her husband had been in the house when he (the detective) came in, she hinted at nothing but the truth.

That is, he was not in the house proper, but the next thing to it.

While his wife had gone back to the kitchen to answer the bell, Avondale had quietly slipped into the hall.

The passage was in total darkness, and, taking advantage of the fact, he had gone part way up the stairs leading to the next flat above, where he sat down upon a step, concealed by the dense darkness, and waited until the newcomer should enter his flat.

Avondale saw Burr pass in, and guessed that he was a detective.

The instant the door had closed upon the detective, Avondale descended to the street door and made his escape.

Once in the street, he hurried along at a rapid gait, and was not long in reaching the elevated railroad station at Eighty-first street.

Taking an up-town train, he rode as far as the road ran, alighted, and made his way across town to the nearest station of the New York Central Railroad.

Luckily, a west-bound train was due in about ten minutes.

He purchased a ticket for Buffalo, that being almost the extent of the little money his wife had slipped into his pocket before his departure, and when the train arrived, got aboard.

He had made no attempt at concealment, partly from a spirit of indifference as to whether he was arrested or not, and partly because he knew that any such attempt would render him much more liable to detection than the careless attitude he had assumed.

The train had not gone more than a minute, when the detective rushed into the station, out of breath.

"The five-thirty train gone?" he demanded of the station agent.

"Gone about a minute."

"Any passengers from this station?"

"One or two?"

"Do you remember whether there was a tall, rather good-looking man, with a brown, pointed beard, and dressed in a gray suit and a light high hat?"

"Yes, I remember him."

"He took the west-bound train, did he?"

"He did."

"Do you remember where his ticket read to?"

"Yes; to Buffalo."

"What was the number of this train?"

"Number 50."

"I see his plan," mused Thad. "His idea is to get to Buffalo, and from there it will not take him many minutes to get over the line into Canada; but I'll play him a trick that he never dreamed of."

Taking out a pencil-pad, he wrote:

"To the Chief of Police of Buffalo, N. Y.: Hold passenger on west-bound, No. 50. Tall, good-looking, brown, pointed beard, light gray suit, tall, light hat. Wanted for murder. Name, Robert W. Avondale. Will follow on next train."

"THAD BURR."

"For the N. Y. Police Dept."

"I imagine that will put a check upon the gentleman's career," reflected the detective, as he made his way toward the telegraph office.

Arriving there, he sent off the telegram, and then, finding he had an hour and a half before the next train, Thad returned home to make some necessary preparations for the trip and took the train at the Grand Central Depot.

CHAPTER X.

LIVELY WORK.

It will be necessary, for the purpose of a thorough understanding, before following the detective on his Western travels, to explain how he discovered that Avondale intended taking the train at Kingsbridge instead of the Forty-second street depot, or that he purposed taking any train leading out of the city.

As may be guessed, the fugitive had got

a long start of the detective, and was well on his way before the latter left the flat.

As we have seen, Avondale took the elevated train at Eighty-first street.

Thad intended to take a train at the same station for down-town.

While he was waiting on the down-town platform he chanced to glance across at the up-town platform, when whom should he see but Avondale.

He dashed down the stairs, across the street, up the other stairs, and in another moment was on the opposite platform, but just a second too late.

The train was already moving out of the station.

There was nothing to do, therefore, but wait for the next train.

This entailed a delay of another ten minutes.

Of course, when he reached the end of the road, his man was nowhere to be seen, and, having ten minutes the start, there was little hope of overhauling him.

Then a happy thought came to him.

It was possible that Avondale would attempt to take an out-of-town train.

If such should be his purpose, he would be most likely to go to the Kingsbridge station.

The detective secured a cab and drove with all haste to this station.

But, although Avondale had walked, his ten minutes' start had served him well, and, as we have seen, Thad missed him by just one minute.

The loss of one minute had been the means of the detective missing his prisoner and losing an hour and a half.

However, he had none too much time to return home (on Thirty-fourth street), make a few hasty preparations for his trip, and reach the Grand Central Depot before the train was ready to start.

Having been awake all night, the detective had not been in his seat long before the monotonous motion of the train had lulled him to sleep, so that a good part of the ride to Albany was made unconsciously.

And even from there to Buffalo the journey was uneventful, but for one circumstance.

In passing through a deep cut, the train was delayed for some time on account of a wreck which had not been entirely cleared from the track.

There was a great deal of confusion, and it was next to impossible to learn any facts, but Thad finally learned sufficient to know that a train which had preceded the one on which he had taken passage had had a "rear collision"—that is, had run into the rear of another train, wrecking it; that the train ahead was a petroleum oil train, and that the carboys were burst and the oil had caught fire; that the flames had extended to the rear train, which was a passenger; that some of the coaches had caught fire, and that a number of passengers had lost their lives and many more had been severely injured.

The dead and wounded had already been removed, and the workmen were busy removing the remainder of the debris from the track, and that was all that could be learned.

Thad's train continued upon its way in a little while, and, finally, late in the afternoon, arrived at Buffalo.

Then, and not till then, did he learn that the wrecked passenger train was none other than No. 50, the train upon which Avondale had taken passage.

"Can it be possible," he mused, "that my man was among the lost?"

While he was still pondering the question, a newsboy came along, crying the Buffalo evening papers.

Thad bought a paper and eagerly scanned its columns.

It was not long before he ran upon what he was looking for.

"Yes, here it is," he said to himself. "Terrible wreck on the Central. Twenty lives known to have been lost, and many more seriously injured."

"Among those taken from the blazing wreck, charred and almost unrecognizable, was the body of a man who is supposed to be Robert W. Avondale, who is wanted in New York for murder."

"There can be little doubt about it be-

ing the man in question, for it is known that he was not only on that train, but in the very car which was burned. The police department of Buffalo had already received a despatch from the New York department, notifying them that the murderer had boarded No. 50, and they were on the lookout for him.

"Swift and terrible retribution to an offender."

This, of course, was only the "display" heading of the article, but it furnished all the information the detective wanted.

"Well," he mused, "if this is correct, my work comes to a sudden and abrupt end; still, there is one chance in a hundred that it is not entirely correct."

"There is a chance that my man was not among the killed."

"In that case, he will probably take a later train, or, possibly, he was slightly injured, and is in some of the hospitals."

"In any event, I now have to do what I should have done in the first place, go to Newtown, or wherever the wounded passengers have been taken, and investigate."

But, upon maturer thought, it occurred to him that if Avondale had been among the wounded, he would have been recognized by some one and reported.

Nevertheless, there was nothing else for him to do but to take the first train back to Newtown; so, after admonishing the Buffalo police to keep a close watch upon all incoming trains from the East, the detective boarded the first east-bound train.

It was after midnight when he arrived at Newtown, and impossible to glean any facts that night, so he was obliged to go to a hotel and wait till morning.

Thad was stirring at an early hour, and, finding that most of the wounded passengers from the wrecked train had been placed in an improvised hospital in the town, he lost no time in visiting it.

But all to no purpose.

He was not long in discovering that his man, or anybody resembling him, was not there.

He also learned that a number who had received slight injuries had been sent to their homes, but a description of these proved that the fugitive was not among them either.

Thad was in a dilemma.

What could have become of his man?

He had certainly not been among the uninjured survivors of the wreck, for they had continued their journey upon the same train with him, and the Buffalo police had closely scrutinized each individual one of these as they left the train.

There now seemed but one thing for Thad to do, which was to return to New York, report his failure, and consult the superintendent as to the best thing to be done next.

On boarding the east-bound train, it chanced that his seat-companion had been on the fated train of the previous night.

He was a native of New York City, had been out on business, and was on his return home.

He was an exceedingly loquacious chap—a young man—and had a great deal to say about the dreadful catastrophe.

Thad listened to his chatter patiently, asking an occasional question, and when they came to speak of the now notorious Avondale, who was supposed to have perished in the burning wreck, the fellow said, in a sneering tone:

"I don't believe that fellow was lost at all."

"What makes you think so?"

"I'll tell you why I don't think so."

"Well?" asked Thad.

"A man was sitting in the next seat to me," pursued the young man, "and we had only got a little way out of New York when I saw him get up and go into the toilet room, carrying his valise along with him. Then I thought he was one of those suspicious chaps that are always afraid of being robbed; but when he came back I can tell you I was astonished. He had taken off the suit he had on, and put on a suit of sailor's clothes."

"You don't say so?" exclaimed Thad, now thoroughly interested.

"Yes, sir. And I thought then that there was something crooked. When we reached the next station but one, which was Sing Sing, the fellow got off, when I knew he had bought a ticket for Buffalo. And then when I heard them talking about an escaped murderer being on the train that was wrecked, I knew that was the man."

CHAPTER XI.

DEAD TO THE WORLD.

When Avondale boarded the train at Kingbridge, he took no precaution to conceal anything, as we have said, and, in consequence, acted so naturally and unconstrainedly that no one seeing him would have suspected anything wrong.

He contrived to maintain this spirit of indifference for some time, but after he had got settled down in his seat, alone with his own thoughts, his indifference forsook him.

The terrible sense of apprehension, of fear, the feeling that he was being followed—that every eye turned upon him penetrated to the innermost recesses of his soul, and there read his secret—came over him.

In short, he experienced the tortures of the murderer.

The feeling soon grew unendurable.

He felt that if he remained there he should go stark mad.

Once or twice he contemplated the rash expedient of jumping off the moving train, but each time was restrained by some inexplicable cause.

At length he hit upon a device.

He remembered the valise, which his wife had assured him contained the sailor's wardrobe of her brother, and made the change described by the stranger whom the detective met on the train.

He then returned to his seat, and was gratified at first to see that nobody had noticed the change.

At least, this was what he imagined.

But he was not long in discovering his mistake.

He saw that a young man in the next seat, who had the appearance of a commercial drummer, had his eyes fixed upon him, and it was not difficult to see that he had taken notice of Avondale's action, and that his suspicions had been aroused thereby.

This added tenfold to the fugitive's agony, and, after enduring it as long as he could, he determined to leave the train at the first convenient opportunity.

Reaching Sing Sing, Avondale concluded that this was his opportunity, and as soon as the train came to a standstill he arose and quietly stole along the aisle to the door, stepped out upon the platform and thence through the station and out into the quiet little town.

His first move was to visit the first barber shop he came to and have his beard removed, leaving only his mustache.

"Now," he mused, as he viewed himself in a mirror, clad in the seaman's suit and devoid of his beard, "it is not likely that they will know me. But I must not stop here. It is more than likely that some one has seen me leave the train, and the detectives will be on my track like sleuth-hounds."

And so he grasped his valise and started on foot out of the town.

He knew not and cared as little where his course led him, his sole object being to keep moving—to keep going—feeling that in so doing he was gradually putting distance between himself and his pursuers.

Thus he trudged on for the entire day, only stopping now and then by the roadside to rest in the cool, inviting shade, or pausing to throw himself down by some brook to quench his thirst.

He avoided all habitations, and so absorbed was his mind in the one idea of steering clear of any living being that he never once thought that he had eaten nothing since the previous day.

It was near nightfall when he at length found himself approaching a village. In fact, he was in the suburbs before he realized the fact.

His first impulse upon making the dis-

covery was to turn back or aside, and go round the village, but at that moment the smell of food cooking assailed his nostrils and for the first time he realized that he was nearly famished.

Even then the thought of coming face to face with any of his species was so repellent to him that he was inclined to hesitate.

But the more he thought of it the more clamorous grew the appeals of nature—the more urgent became his stomach's demands for food, and soon he found himself growing faint.

Then he began to reason with himself, and became soon convinced that no one would recognize him in that make-up, even if there was any one in the village who had an interest in finding him.

So his mind was at length made up, and he walked along the one street of the village till he came to a restaurant.

It was not a particularly inviting place, but it promised quiet, and, besides, appeared to be about the best place of entertainment in the village, so, with some qualms and misgivings he at length entered.

There was a sort of bar in front and a room with half a dozen tables in the back, so he passed on into the back room, although in his fatigued condition there was a strong inclination to stop in the bar and get something to drink.

He remembered the vow he had taken never to touch the accursed stuff again, however, and resisted.

Seating himself at one of the little tables, he ordered an economical meal.

When the girl brought him a glass of water and put it upon the table she also brought a New York evening paper and threw it down beside his plate.

The sight of the newspaper gave him a shudder, and he was inclined to push it away.

He knew it would contain an account of his crime, and he did not wish to read it.

But in spite of his repugnance, after a little thought the desire seized him to see just what they had to say about it, anyway, and he picked up the paper and looked for the article.

He had not far to look.

There, on the front page, with a "displayed" heading half as long as his arm, it glared at him.

He ran his eye hastily over the flaring lines of display type, and then suddenly he stopped, uttered a suppressed gasp, and nearly dropped the paper.

"What's this?" he gasped. "Dead? Perished in the burning train? A swift and horrible retribution of Providence! Heavens! What does it mean?"

And he dropped the paper and stroked his forehead to collect his senses.

Then he took up the sheet again and glanced at the article.

"Yes, there it is. Robert W. Avondale, the murderer, dead—burned to an unrecognizable cinder in the blazing train."

"Thank God!" he cried aloud. And then recollecting where he was, he said, to himself:

"Yes, I am dead to the world, and from this day I begin a new life. Heaven grant that it may be a better one than the old one!"

At that moment the girl came in with his meal.

She was smiling as she set the dishes upon the table, but Avondale took no note of it.

"You seem to have seen something in the paper that pleased ye," she said.

"Yes—rather," he replied, dryly.

"I'm glad o' that," she prattled on; "glad that somebody finds good news—I never kin."

But Avondale was too much engrossed in the double subject of his discovery and the discussion of the meal before him to have any clear conception of her remarks and only vouchsafed a grunt in reply.

"Nothing but bad news all the time," the girl went on, "and now comes the worst of all."

"Um," grunted the fugitive.

"Yes," she pursued, in a pathetic tone, "my beau was to marry me this fall and

take me to the city, and now I see by this paper that his boss was murdered last night."

"Eh? What's that?" gasped the colonel, nearly jumping from the table.

"I say that my beau's boss was murdered last night," she repeated, not noticing his agitation. "Didn't you see it?"

"See what?" murmured he, in a dazed voice.

"About the murder of Mr. Frederick Marboro."

"Frederick Marboro?" he gasped.

And then recollecting himself, he said, in a calmer tone:

"Yes, yes—I saw that. It was very strange—very terrible."

"Wasn't it awful? But they'll never catch the murderer, for he's dead—burned alive in the train last night. Did you see that?"

"Ye—Yes, I saw it," muttered he, growing terribly agitated, "but please don't—"

"And it just serves him right, don't you think so?"

"Yes, yes, served him right. But do, please—"

"But it would be funny if it should turn out that he wasn't dead, after all, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, yes, very funny," he answered, in an irritated voice. "But won't you please—"

"What do you think about it, sir?" she persisted. "Do you really think he is dead, now?"

"Yes, yes—there is not the least doubt of it. Robert Avondale is dead! Burned to a cinder in the flaming coach!"

CHAPTER XII. ON THE TRAIL.

By the time the east-bound train bearing the detective reached Sing Sing it was well along in the forenoon, and over twenty-six hours after Avondale left the west-bound train at the same station.

He therefore realized the almost hopelessness of the attempt to overtake his man after all this lapse of time.

Still, his vast experience with criminals had taught him that they were slow travelers, and that they frequently spent long periods wandering about a small radius of country.

This knowledge inspired the detective with sufficient hope to encourage him to stop at Sing Sing with a view to discovering what he could of the fugitive's whereabouts.

Inquiry at the station and thereabouts failed to furnish the slightest clew, for the reason that nobody had noticed Avondale leave the train, and as he did not stop for an instant about the station, no one had noticed him leave it.

The detective's work, therefore, must begin in the dark.

An ordinary man would have abandoned the task then and there, but Thad Burr had unraveled too many mysteries to become discouraged so easily.

His first move was to visit all the resorts in the town and make inquiries.

Colonel Bob had not visited a single saloon or other resort in the town, so that Thad's search in this direction was in vain.

It then occurred to him that Avondale, being very poor—the old servant had told him that he had gambled all his money away—he would be most likely to leave the town on foot by some one of the country roads.

He, therefore, began the arduous task of walking along these country roads, one after the other, for a distance, and making diligent inquiries of every one he chanced to meet if he or she had seen a man in sailor uniform going that way; but he made the mistake of describing the man as having a pointed beard. So that the day was spent, and not a person had been found who had seen his man.

Fatigued and disheartened, he at length, late in the afternoon, returned into the village.

Happening to pass a barber shop, it occurred to him that he needed a shave, and went in.

The barber happened to be one of the

talkative kind, and at once began to gossip upon various subjects, and soon got round to the subject of the collision and wreck of the two trains on the Central.

This recalled to Thad's mind more vividly than ever the subject which had been uppermost for the past thirty-six hours, and, knowing the average barber's peculiarity for gathering village news, it occurred to him that this man might know something.

"I don't suppose you ever see many sailors up this way, do you?" he asked.

"No, sir, not many," replied the barber; "but once in a while one comes along. Now, there was one in here yesterday morning. What makes me recollect him so well is that he had a pointed beard of the fashionablest cut, which was sort of funny for a sailor, I thought."

"Ah! What sort of a looking man was he—short and thickset?"

"You couldn't have went wider of the mark. He was tall, slender, and handsome."

"Ah! this was strange, for a sailor. You didn't happen to learn this interesting gentleman's name, did you?"

"No, sir. The fact is, he wouldn't talk. I tried in every way to draw him into conversation, but 'Yes' and 'No' was all I could get out of him. I think he must have had something on his mind, for I never seen a person act so queer."

"In what way?"

"Oh! he kept his eyes dodging about all the time, as if he was afraid something would happen that he wouldn't see. He'd turn clean over in the chair while I was shaving him to see who had come in at the door, and he would start at every sound like a man with delirium tremens."

"Maybe that was his trouble," suggested Thad.

"No; I hardly think so. He didn't look like a hard-drinking man."

"In the few words you did succeed in getting out of him, did you receive any intimation as to where he intended to go from here?"

"No; he wouldn't talk."

Thad left the shop little wiser than he entered it.

He had learned one important fact, however, and that was that the fugitive had shaved off his beard, and the knowledge would most likely prove useful in assisting the detective to identify him.

It was dark by this time, and too late to do anything more that night, so Thad went to the best hotel there was in the village and secured lodgings for the night.

After supper, he strolled into the bar-room, which was partly filled with loungers, a good proportion of whom were countrymen, either farmers or farm laborers.

The detective sauntered about among them, listening to their conversation, hoping to catch some scrap or fragment of a clew that would serve as a basis upon which to start to work.

What he heard, however, was of no interest to him, and after spending an hour in this unprofitable way, the detective was about to withdraw to his room, when two men came in, walked up to the bar and ordered drinks.

One was evidently a farmer of the more prosperous type, and the other, judging from his clothing and manner, appeared to be a small shopkeeper of some kind.

They were talking with a good deal of animation, and, with the vague hope of learning something to his profit, the detective sauntered up to the bar, close beside the newcomers, and ordered a mild drink.

Then he listened.

"Yas, from what you say, it must 'a' been the same man, I reckon," said one. "I kinder suspected that was somethin' wror— from the start—he nuther looked nor talked like a sailor; he was too kinder hifalutin' in his talk, and now his hands was too white and soft, and that wa'n't no tan onto his cheeks. Yew cain't fool me in sich things; but Bettie begged so hard fer me to let 'im stay—said he was sich a nice man, and all that, that I fin'ly consented."

"Well, you was lucky that he didn't steal nuthin', though I must say that when

he got supper to my place in Nyack he paid for what he got."

"Oh, as to that," interjected the other, "I didn't ax him nuthin'. Thet's somethin' I never done in my life—charge a stranger for stayin' all night to my house. The only thing I'm kickin' 'bout is that Bettie's all worked up over him. I do b'lieve the gal's in love with the critter, and him a-goin' off like that afore any on us was up, kinder broke her up."

"And that proves just what I say—that there's something wrong with him. He acted mighty funny when he was to my restaurant; kept watchin' everybody that come in, and startin' at every little noise. If it hadn't been that his hair was so long and he wore a mustache, I should say he was an escaped convict. He came from this direction, you know."

"Pardon me, gentlemen," interrupted Thad, at this juncture, "but I believe I have some interest in the person whom you are discussing. You won't mind if I ask you a few questions?"

The two men eyed the detective suspiciously, and then exchanged glances.

"I reckon not," at length replied the restaurant keeper. "What did you want to know?"

"Was the man you were speaking of tall, rather handsome, and intelligent?"

"Yes, yes," responded both men, in chorus.

"Did you learn his name?"

"I didn't," returned the publican.

"He told us his name was Wilson," said the farmer.

"And he stopped over night with you, did he?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have no idea which way he went, have you?"

"No, sir. He got up and left before any of us was up in the mornin'. Say, mister, was that anything wrong with him?"

"He is a murderer, that's all!"

"What!" gasped both men in chorus.

"He is the man that murdered Frederick Marboro!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A CLOSE CALL.

Thad was no better off than before.

He had learned where his man had been, but no clew which would lead to where he was at present.

Indeed, the circumstance of his arriving and leaving the farmhouse before any of the family were up indicated that he might be a long way off by this time.

And the worst feature of it was, the detective had not the remotest idea which way to start.

After some further conversation with the two men, Thad discovered that Avondale had taken supper the previous evening at the village of Haverstraw, some twelve miles from Sing Sing, and that he had stopped the same night at the farmer's house, which was not more than six miles from Sing Sing.

This showed that, although the fugitive had left Sing Sing the morning previous and gone as far as Haverstraw, he had walked back half the distance, proving his theory that murderers are inclined to move about in a prescribed radius.

By this same hypothesis, therefore, it was not at all impossible that he might be either actually in the village at that moment or not very far away from it.

However, there was nothing to be done that night, and as he had been two nights without sleep, Thad soon retired.

Between his anxiety and the buoyant country air, he arose with the sun the next morning and took a walk before breakfast.

It did not require many minutes' walk to take him beyond the suburbs of the village, and he was soon strolling through country lanes and along flowering hedges, breathing the sweet, wholesome country air.

The morning was bright, and the air soft and balmy, and in the contemplation of the peaceful scene about him, he forgot for the moment, the sordid calling that had brought him into that part of the country.

On he meandered, finding new beauties and fresh objects of interest at every step.

At length the lane he was traversing terminated, and the road became flanked on either side by a deep, dense wood.

Still he pursued his way, however, more deeply impressed with the rustling mystery about him than he had been in the fields.

He had gone but a short distance, however, when something occurred to disturb his peaceful reverie.

The sound of snapping twigs had attracted his attention, and, upon looking about, he saw the figure of a man dimly outlined through the thick trellis of branches and shrubs.

Supposing him to be some early hunter, Thad would have allowed him to pass without further notice, but while he watched, the figure emerged from the thicket and passed across a comparatively open space, when, to the detective's surprise, he saw that the man had on a sailor's uniform.

He had but an instantaneous glimpse of him, when he again disappeared into another thicket.

But Thad had seen enough.

He could not mistake that face, even without the beard.

The wild, haunted look in the eyes, the stealthy, terrified movement, were the same that he had seen the night that Avondale emerged from Marboro's house.

But there was a great change in the face.

In addition to the loss of the beard, there was a haggard, worn expression, which seemed scarcely conceivable in two days of the most acute suffering.

Thad did not stop to consider these matters then, however, but as soon as he had recovered from the momentary bit of surprise into which the unexpected appearance of this man had thrown him, he dashed off in the direction the fugitive had vanished.

The distance was not more than a hundred yards, which, to a fleet runner like the detective, was but a step, to be got over in no time.

Thad did not pause or take any pains to watch which way, if any, the fugitive took, until he had reached the spot where he had last seen him, and when he did reach the place, it was only to find that the object of his search had disappeared.

There was a thicket—the one into which Thad had seen him disappear.

But this thicket did not appear to extend very far, and if the fellow was in there he would soon rout him.

Thad plunged into the thicket and pushed his way through its thick, tangled meshes for some distance.

And then he came abruptly upon a perpendicular rock or cliff that rose to a height of a hundred feet or more.

But no fugitive was in sight.

And, what was strangest, there did not appear to be any place for him to conceal himself.

The detective looked about in every direction.

But not a living creature was to be seen.

Then it occurred to him that the fellow must have gone in another direction.

That he had not gone this way seemed beyond question.

As he reflected upon the strange circumstance, he cast his eyes up over the face of the rock, and finally noticed what appeared, from where he stood, to be a small aperture, scarcely large enough to put his fist in.

He also noticed that a tree stood near the base of the rock, the topmost branches of which grew above the aperture in the face of the rock.

A closer inspection showed that the tree had been recently climbed, for there were not only abrasions of the bark, but bits of earth on the branches and in the forks which had evidently been deposited there from human feet.

There could be no doubt, from all this evidence, that some one had climbed the tree, but the puzzle was, could any one have got into the hole in the rock?

This did not seem possible.

Still, Thad knew how deceptive appearances were, taken from a distance.

And then, just as he was about convincing himself of the possibility of a man entering the aperture, his eye fell upon a piece of crumpled paper lying at the foot of the tree.

Picking it up carelessly, he discovered that there was something written on it in pencil, and so pale as to be almost illegible.

He finally succeeded in deciphering it, however, and this is what it was:

"Find tree neer fut of Rock yo will no tree by havin' string tyed rownd clime up too Top of tree and their find hole in rock this is entrance to cave yo air safe heer from all comers."

The handwriting was equally bad with the spelling and punctuation, and the little document started a train of thought in the detective's mind.

The fugitive had met some sympathetic person in his wanderings in whom he had reposed sufficient confidence to confide his secret, and the other had repaid his confidence by giving him these instructions how to escape.

But how did the poor outcast expect to escape in this way?

If the aperture was the opening to a cave, all he could hope for would be temporary concealment.

The moment the place should be discovered, if it ever should be, his fate would be surely sealed, for there would be no means of escape.

Besides, how did he hope to live in such a place?

Where was he to obtain food?

It would be but a question of time when he would starve to death in such a place.

And this reference to food reminded the detective that he had not yet had his breakfast, and was, in consequence, extremely hungry and weak.

Nevertheless, he could not think of abandoning his search at that stage, for much might depend upon a few minutes.

He, therefore, began the ascent of the tree.

Being an agile climber, it did not take him many seconds to reach the top, or, at least, a position from which, by swinging somewhat, he could throw himself upon the ledge, which he now discovered jutted from the face of the cliff immediately beneath the hole.

It never for an instant occurred to Thad that there was any danger until he swung himself over and landed on the ledge.

Then, when he turned and tried to peer back into the black, forbidding hole opening into the bowels of the rock, a faint sense of dread came over him.

Then, for the first time, he realized how completely he was, out there in the light, at the mercy of any one concealed back in the darkness.

But he did not allow this feeling to oppress him long.

And a moment later he was crawling upon his hands and knees through the hole.

He had not gone far before he found that the assertion in the slip of paper, which the fugitive had dropped at the foot of the tree; that the hole was the opening to a cave, was correct.

As soon as he got inside, he could stand and walk erect.

He paused for some time to listen, but there was no sound, so he pushed on, groping his way through the darkness, feeling ahead of him with his hands to prevent running his head against a rock.

After he had gone some distance, he again paused and listened.

There was the sound of footsteps, it seemed, just ahead.

He thought he must be mistaken, and listened more intently.

No; there could be no mistake—it was the sound of human footsteps as plainly as he had ever heard them in his life, and they were receding.

And then, as if to dispel any doubt that might remain, the detective, on taking another step forward, came into a position where there was a faint halo of light ahead of him, and in this barely visible light the outlines of a man could be seen.

CHAPTER XIV.
THE INITIATION.

Poor Tommy Watson was led off into another room by the crooks to be initiated into the mysteries of the Brotherhood of Thugs and Burglars.

He was badly frightened, naturally, knowing that the men who had him in hand had no love for him anyway, and guessing that the ceremony was pretty rough.

As soon as they got him into a small room, which served as the ante-room of a large apartment, they submitted a number of questions to him and administered the oath.

Then came the beginning of the dreadful ordeal.

He was blindfolded.

This had the effect of increasing his terror tenfold.

He was then led along, he knew not where, and pretty soon somebody said, in a deep, sepulchral voice:

"A stranger awaits our mystic rites."

"Has he taken the great oath?" came a voice from within.

"He has."

"Then admit him."

Tommy was led along a little further, and the fact that he heard a door slam behind him led him to believe that he had passed into another room.

"Now at once the chains prepare," came a solemn voice from somewhere.

"They are here," responded another.

At the same time the sound of rattling chains could be heard.

"Entwine their links about him."

Then Tommy felt them binding him in chains.

"Man in darkness and chains," chanted the solemn voice, "mournful the spectacle; yet it is what every one of us may expect who is foolish enough to get caught. Remember, there are but two sins known to our noble order—getting caught and betraying a brother."

"Will the stranger do either?"

"The first he will not, if he can avoid it; the second under no consideration—even to save his life."

"Is this true, stranger?" asked some one close to him, at the same time slapping him sharply on the back to make him sensible of the fact that he had been addressed.

Tommy answered feebly:

"Yes."

"Then lead him on," came the solemn voice.

He was led about the room till he was nearly ready to drop, and doubtless would have done so, had not two strong hands grasped him by the arm and supported him.

At length a solemn voice cried:

"The traveler is weary."

"Then let him rest."

With that the young man was pushed gently backward until he felt a chair come against his legs, and then the two strong hands were placed on his shoulders and he was forced downward.

Tommy took the hint, and sat down, but had no more than done so when he sprang up again.

A large wet sponge was on the chair, and he had sat upon it.

"Know you not that there is no rest from the cradle to the grave?" mumbled the deep, solemn voice.

"Then onward!" cried another.

And again poor Tom was walked around and around till he was ready to faint with fatigue.

At length his conductors stopped, and the terrible voice asked:

"Has he yet reached the top of the hill of perfection?"

"Yes," answered another.

"Then give him the anointed cat."

This command was extremely ambiguous to Tom—he could not interpret its meaning at first—but he was not long to remain in doubt.

For the next minute some unseen hand began to shower blows upon his defenseless back with some sort of a whip, that made the poor fellow writhe and howl with every blow.

At length, to his great relief, this crue

to an end, and the mysterious voice said:

"Has he been sufficiently chastised?"

"He has."

"So that the punishments meted out to our brotherhood by the bloodhounds of the law will have no terrors for him?"

"Yes."

"Then restore him to light and liberty."

Instantly the chains were taken off and the bandage removed from his eyes.

Poor Tom looked about him in mingled terror and amazement.

On all sides stood figures in long white robes and black masks.

His wonder was where all these people had suddenly sprung from, as there had been but five people in the flat besides himself before he had been blindfolded.

He was led out of the room into the little ante-room from which he had started, and thence into the common sitting-room.

He was astonished, on re-entering this apartment, to see the five men sitting about the table, smoking and drinking, just as they were when he first came in, and he was half-inclined to believe that what he had passed through was nothing but a horrible dream.

"Wal, me boy," began the Patriarch, "yer got t'rough wid it and come out alive, didn't yer?"

Tom groaned an affirmative.

"Dat's right," vociferated the old man. "Ye're a brave lad, and now ye're one on us."

It was not far from daylight by this time, and the rascals soon dispersed to their various rooms and went to bed.

Tom was shown a cot in a little room by himself, but there was no sleep for him.

The dreadful experiences of the night had been too much for his nerves.

The thought of his action in leaving his employer's door unlocked, which, he could not help but realize, had led indirectly to Marlboro's murder, haunted him.

Then he thought of the probability of Colonel Bob, an innocent man, being accused of the crime.

This weighed upon him more than anything else.

Even his initiation into the organization, terrible as it was, was not as bad as this.

He pondered the question for a long time, and tried in vain to reach a solution of the problem—what should he do?—and several times arrived at the conclusion that the only thing to do was to divulge the whole plot, turn detective, and have the real criminals brought to justice.

But there was the dreadful realization, first, that he himself would be implicated as accessory, or, that if he escaped this, he would be spotted by the gang of thugs, and his life would be in constant danger.

What was to be done?

This he asked himself again and again.

It was in vain that he tried to quiet his conscience with the reflection that it was none of his business; he could not but realize that it was.

It was late in the day when any of the rascals arose, and when Tommy joined them at their midday breakfast, they remarked his worn and haggard look.

"De nishyashun was too much fer yer, young man, I reckon," commented the Patriarch, with a chuckle. "But dat ain't nuttin' ter what yer'll have ter go t'rough later on."

A little later Paschal, who was scanning the morning paper, looked up and remarked:

"I see that that fellow Avondale tried to escape, and was burned to death in a burning train on the Central."

"Dat's a good job for all parties concerned, as de gent said w'en his mudder-in-law croaked," commented the Patriarch. "It'll save de expense o' investigation."

"Yes; if he actually perished," said Spider, with a sneer.

"D'y'e yer t'ink it possible dat he didn't?"

"There have been cases where criminals took advantage of such catastrophes. I am not saying what this fellow may or may not have done, however."

"I don't t'ink yer need ter worry in his case. In my 'pinion, he's as dead as a door nail."

These, and a few more similar remarks, set young Watson to thinking, and before the day was out he had decided upon a plan of action.

He would hunt up the fugitive, if still living, and to be found, and convince him of his innocence.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERIOUS RESCUER.

When Thad caught sight of the figure in the cave he forgot everything else, and hastened with his utmost speed after it.

Only a transitory glimpse was had of the figure, as it passed before the dim halo of light, and then it vanished.

The detective guessed that the light was occasioned by another outlet to the cave, and he knew that if there was such a thing, the fugitive was doubtless making for it, and unless he (the detective) did some very lively work, the fellow would make his escape in that direction.

He therefore hurried along in the direction in which he had seen the light.

What puzzled him, though, was the fact that, although he was undoubtedly drawing momentarily nearer the location of the halo of light, it had vanished after he had gone a short distance, and did not reappear.

Nevertheless, he plunged on through the darkness, pausing at intervals to listen, but without avail.

Not a sound could be heard.

At length he began to suspect that he had wandered off into some tunnel or passage of the cave which, instead of leading to the supposed outlet, carried him deeper and deeper into the sightless depths of the mountain.

The thought terrified him for an instant.

For he knew that if this surmise was correct, he would be as likely to run off into other misleading tunnels in attempting to escape from this one.

However, after a little reflection, he concluded to pursue his course a little further.

And it was well he did.

He had not gone a dozen yards before he came to an abrupt elbow or turn in the tunnel.

Groping his way around a wall of damp, perpendicular rock, he suddenly came into a broad, clean chamber, twenty-five feet in diameter, and right ahead, not thirty feet away, an opening admitted the light of day, which flooded the chamber.

It had been the reflection of this, cast against the shining wet walls and refracted around the bend in the passage, that had first attracted his attention, and shown him the outlines of the figure.

And that recalled the fact that the figure was nowhere to be seen at that moment.

He cast his eyes about the clean, perpendicular walls of the chamber, and there did not appear to be any place where a human being could conceal himself.

Then it occurred to him that the fugitive might have escaped through the opening, so he hastened to it and looked out.

To his great surprise the outlet overlooked the broad, shimmering expanse of the Hudson River, which rippled and murmured something like a hundred feet below.

After a hasty glance across the grand old river, which was now aglow with the early morning sun, the detective cast his eyes downward.

The first thing that caught his eye was a small boat moored at the foot of the cliff, manned by two sturdy-looking men, while a third man was in the act of embarking from the narrow ledge which intervened between the base of the cliff and the edge of the water.

It wanted but a glance to show the detective that the latter was the identical man for whom he was looking.

The question then arose, how had he got down from that lofty perch?

But this was soon solved.

Looking down at his feet, Thad noticed a rope running over the ledge of the opening and thence descending to within a few feet of the water.

The fugitive had evidently carried the rope into the cave with him.

Thad's first impulse was to grasp the rope and glide down.

But a moment's thought convinced him of the folly of such a thing.

He would be too late to overhaul his man now, as the boat was already putting off, and the next difficulty would be in getting up again or away from the spot where he would alight.

The narrow ledge at the foot of the cliff only extended a short distance, even if it had been wide enough for him to walk along.

Besides, it would be an endless task to attempt to walk to the end of the pallade or to a point where he could climb up.

He was therefore compelled to be content with sitting there and watching the little boat shoot away from the shore.

But he determined to watch which shore it made for and at what point it made a landing.

The little boat paddled along down the river, and there appeared no inclination on the part of its occupants to land on either shore.

"I wonder if it can be possible that they are heading for New York?" mused the detective. "If that is the intention I shall have a poor chance of capturing my man, unless I keep him in sight. But how is that to be done? I cannot follow his course from here, and by the time I get out of here, secure a conveyance and reach the river, he will be out of sight."

However, the latter, he realized, was the only alternative, so he hurried back through the cave, descended by means of the tree, and was soon on his way back to Sing Sing.

Upon arriving at the village once more he did not wait to get breakfast.

Indeed, the thought of it had entirely vanished from his mind.

Repairing to the nearest livery stable, he engaged the fastest horse to be had, had him saddled, and, mounting, dashed away.

Thad soon struck the river road at a point where he had a superb view of the wide channel.

He strained his eyes to scan the river in every direction in the hope of discerning the little boat containing the fugitive.

Several small craft were in sight, but he could not discern, at the distance he was from them, whether any of them was the boat in question or not.

At length, however, he fixed upon one as being the most likely of any of the lot, as it contained three persons, one of whom was a sailor, or appeared to be.

This boat was still some distance above, and working slowly down.

So he reined in his horse and awaited its arrival opposite.

This did not take long, and when the boat came opposite he was satisfied that the man in sailor uniform was Avondale.

Appearance aside, the fact that he sat in the bow while the other men rowed, indicated that he was a passenger, and naturally Thad inferred that he was his man.

He turned his horse and was about to proceed along the river, keeping the little boat in sight, when he almost collided with another man on horseback.

The other horseman also appeared to be watching the same boat, or some other object in the river in the vicinity of it, and was so absorbed in whatever it was that he appeared not to see the detective even when he almost ran against him.

Thad remarked that he was a young man of not more than twenty, that he was well dressed, and that his hair and the faint suspicion of a mustache which was on his upper lip were of a bright auburn tinge.

Thad was on the point of riding on

when the stranger, just noticing him, called out:

"Ah, good day, sir. Beg your pardon. I didn't see you before."

"Good day," returned Thad, good naturedly. "I hope you are enjoying good health."

"First class," answered the young man. "I was just looking at that small boat out yonder. Have you noticed it, sir?"

"Which one?" asked the detective, innocently.

"The one nearest the shore, there, sir, with three men aboard."

"I notice it now that you call my attention to it. What about it?"

"I was going to ask you if you think that chap in the bow is a sailor?"

"He appears to be attired in a sailor costume. Why do you ask?"

"Oh—er—I was curious to know, that was all."

He rode along at the detective's side in silence for some distance, and then suddenly observed:

"I say, do you live in these parts, sir?"

"No, I live in New York."

"You have heard of the Marboro murderer, haven't you?"

"Seems to me I have heard something about it."

"Well, you know he was supposed to have been killed by Colonel Avondale?"

"Yes, I think I heard something to that effect."

"Of course he wasn't, you know—"

"Why do you say of course he wasn't?" interrupted the detective.

"Well, sir, I happen to know he wasn't, but that makes no difference. Everybody, including Colonel Bob himself, believes him guilty, and everybody, except himself and myself, believes that he was burned to death in the wrecked train on the Central."

Thad, who up to that instant had imagined the fellow to be some rattle-brained gossip, suddenly changed his opinion, and concluded that he was some "smart Aleek" of a detective who had been sent out by the police department.

"How do you know all this?" asked Thad.

"I was there!"

CHAPTER XVI.

OLD FRIENDS.

When Tommy Watson finally made up his mind that he would find Avondale and convince him of his innocence, he could not rest easy until he had got started on his journey.

This was not an easy matter, however.

The first thing to be done was to get away from the flat without exciting the rascals' suspicions.

This was the principal impediment in the way.

But he had made up his mind and was not to be foiled.

The gang, having nothing else to do, and feeling pretty good over the haul they had made the night previous, put in the day—after they finally arose—in drinking.

Along in the afternoon, therefore, they grew drowsy, and one by one they dropped off asleep.

At length everybody was asleep except the Patriarch, and he was pretty well under the influence of liquor.

So Tommy had little difficulty in giving him the slip.

As soon as he was away from the flat he began to puzzle his brains for a plan of action.

At length he hit upon one.

He would go to the depot and buy a ticket straight through to Buffalo, and, beginning there, work back toward New York.

This would be a little expensive, but he did not care for the expense, as he had the five hundred dollars the Patriarch gave him still in his pocket.

A train went at seven-fifteen, and this he took.

When the train reached Sing Sing Tommy was reminded that he had a sweetheart at a village a short distance

from there, and, learning that he could get a lay-over ticket, he decided to take the opportunity to go over and call upon the young woman.

When he got off the train, however, he found that the village was farther off than he thought—some twelve miles.

Nevertheless, he determined to go out, and hired a horse at the livery stable for that purpose.

Tommy's sweetheart's father kept a restaurant in the village, and she waited upon the table.

She was delighted to see Tommy, but, after the first greeting, she whimpered:

"Now that your boss is dead, I don't suppose ye'll want to marry me this fall, Tommy."

"Him being dead wouldn't stop me, Kittle. But I've got something else on the string."

"Another girl?"

"Naw, you foolish girl. I've got a mission to fulfill."

"A mission? What's that?"

"Sit down and I'll tell you."

Tommy then related the account of the murder, and at its conclusion, remarked:

"And now I'm going to find that man if he is still living and convince him of his innocence, take him back to his wife and family, and bring about the conviction of the real murderer."

"What did you say the man's name is that you think is innocent?"

"Avondale. Colonel Bob Avondale."

"And you aren't sure he's living?"

"No, I don't know for certain. My opinion is that he is, but he may be dead."

"No, he's living."

"How do you know, Kittle?"

"A man was in here the other night, and he said he was."

"What did he know about it?"

"I dunno how he knew, but he did."

"What sort of a looking man was he?"

"He was a sailor, although he didn't look a bit like one, except his clothes. He was tall and very handsome, but how funny he acted. He would start at every sound, and when I asked him if he had heard about the murder of Mr. Marboro, he turned as white as a sheet and began to tremble awful."

"Did he have a full beard?"

"No, only a mustache."

"And you say he acted queer?"

"Yes, so queer that I half thought he must be the murderer."

"And I shouldn't wonder if he was, Kittle—that is, the man who is wrongfully accused of it. Do you know which way he went from here?"

"Yes, he went back toward Sing Sing."

"How do you know?"

"Because papa met Abe Lunt in Sing Sing the next day and he told papa that the same man stopped over night at his house."

"Ahd from there?"

"I dunno."

"Well, I'll find out, Kittle, thanks to your information. It was a lucky thing that I came out to see you."

"Is that all that brought you out? If it was you might as well have stayed away."

"No, Kittle, darling, you know it wasn't. But it was lucky just the same. You always bring me luck. Good-by."

"Are you off so soon? You no more than get here when you run away again."

"But my mission, Kittle. I must not forget my mission."

"Oh, plague take your mission! You've always got something. Last time it was a 'lead-pipe cinch.' I wonder what it will be next time?"

"A marriage license, dear."

"Do you mean it, Tommy?"

"You bet!"

"Then I'll let you off this time. Good-by."

Tommy lost no time in riding back to the Lunt farm-house, although it was long after the farmer's bedtime when he arrived.

And when, at length, he succeeded in routing the old chap out, his trouble was

all for nothing, as the farmer did not know which direction the fugitive had taken on leaving the house.

Tommy made inquiry along the road for some distance, but to no purpose, and finally returned to Sing Sing.

But the following day he again engaged a horse and proceeded to scour the country.

But his success was no better than that of the day previous, and the third day was attended with no better success.

On the fourth day he started out earlier than usual, and this day he decided to watch the river, although a man of judgment would have told him that this was useless.

The sun was no more than up when he rode out on the river road and began his vigil.

He had been here for two hours and had just espied the little boat with the sailor-dressed man in the bow, when Thad encountered him.

"You say you were there?" said the detective, in response to his assertion. "What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? What does anybody mean when they say they were at a certain place? Not that they were some other place. If you had business that took you to Brooklyn, you wouldn't tell your wife that you had been to Jersey City or Harlem, would you? You wouldn't—"

"But let me understand you," interrupted the detective. "Do you mean to tell me that you were present when Frederick Marboro was murdered?"

"I do."

Thad thought he had got hold of a champion liar.

Not putting any store by what he told, he concluded to have some fun with him.

So he asked:

"And you are positive, then, that Avondale is not the man?"

"I wish I was as innocent of any sin as Colonel Bob is of that crime."

"Who was the guilty man, then?"

Tommy turned quickly and caught the detective's eye.

There was a twinkle in it that Tommy did not like.

He believed that he had made a discovery.

This inquisitive fellow must be, nay, could be no one else but one of the Spider's henchmen and spies.

Tommy boiled over with indignation.

He was angry that the fellow should presume to catechise him in such a manner, and angry with himself for having foolishly told him so much of his own business.

Before answering, however, he concluded to test the fellow, and threw him one of the gang's secret recognition signs which he had just learned a few nights before.

Instead of the detective responding with the proper sign, he laughed at the young man's strange action.

This Tommy interpreted as either an intended insult from one of the fraternity in refusing to acknowledge the sign, or that the fellow did not wish to betray himself as a member of the order.

"Oh, no you don't," snarled the young man. "You may refuse to respond to the sign, but I'm dead onto you just the same, and a bit too' fly' to be caught napping by any spy of Ned Paschal."

Thad opened his eyes in genuine surprise at this remark.

He had heard of Edwin Paschal, and knew him by reputation to be one of the worst crooks in the city.

Therefore his name mentioned in this manner caused the detective genuine astonishment.

"What do you know of that man?" he demanded, at last.

"Not as much as you do, maybe, but all I want to."

Thad began to see daylight.

"Do you imagine that I belong to that rascal's gang?"

"It don't require any imagination. Anybody would know that by looking at you."

The joke was too good for the great detective to remain out of temper with the

young man, and he decided to humor the jest.

"Well, then, I am a member of that gang."

"I knew it, and for that reason I'll get along before you pick my pockets."

And away he rode, but never for an instant removing his eyes from the small boat.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS.

Thad was in a quandary what to make of the young man.

He no longer believed him to be a Central Office detective, and he neither talked nor looked like a professional thug.

Indeed, his declaration that Avondale was innocent would indicate to the contrary. A professional thug would not bother his head about such a matter.

But, what puzzled the detective, was to know why the young man desired to keep the fugitive in sight; and he regretted that he had not used a little more tact and won the fellow's good graces until he had learned more about him.

Now it was too late, and his only alternative was to watch him.

Meanwhile, Tommy had ridden on a little in advance of Thad, again riveted his eyes on the boat, and apparently forgotten the detective's very existence.

Thus matters continued for the space of an hour or two.

At length they came to a section of the road where the view of the river was shut out by an intervening series of crags.

This caused Thad a good deal of anxiety, and he could see that the young man, who was still in the lead, was nervous over the affair.

The barrier extended, as the detective knew, for something like half a mile further along, and he realized that in that distance and the time that the boatmen would be out of his sight, they could slip into a cove, make a landing and escape, or any one of a dozen things without his being the wiser.

A short distance along the road there was a point from which there was a clear view of the river again, and he decided to put spurs and gain this point as soon as possible.

He buried the spurs in his horse's flanks, and the animal made a plunge forward.

Instantly the young man, who appeared to have forgotten him up to that moment, wheeled his horse into the path, completely impeding his progress, and at the same time covering the detective with his revolver.

"Halt!" he yelled, sternly. "Don't try that on me!"

"Idiot!" cried Thad, indignantly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that none of Ned Paschal's spies shall get ahead of me. I see what you are up to."

"Lower your pistol and let me pass, you consummate jackass! or I'll put a bullet through you! I'm no spy of Ned Paschal, nor have anything to do with him."

"No use telling me that. You've already confessed that you were a member of the gang, and I know what your scheme is—you want to get at you fellow in the boat and put him out of the way so that he can't testify against your master."

Thad was stricken dumb.

He understood, or thought he understood, it all now.

Paschal had been in some way implicated with Avondale in the murder of Marboro, and the outlaw was afraid that if Avondale should be caught, he would turn State's evidence and convict him.

He had, therefore, sent this young jackanapes out to watch the fugitive to prevent any interference on the part of the detective.

All this flashed through Thad's mind in the fraction of a minute, and his indignation arose accordingly.

Whipping out his revolver, with the rapidity of lightning, and pushing the muzzle into the astonished Tommy's face, he yelled:

"Stand aside, I say! or, curse you! I'll make a corpse of you in about a second!"

Tommy did not quail.

He was not in the least frightened, but he was greatly surprised, and taken so completely off his guard that he was unable to make a move for the instant.

And, before he had recovered his self-possession, the detective had ridden round him and dashed on ahead.

Tommy was not to be put out entirely, however, and before Thad had proceeded very far, the young man raised his pistol and fired.

The ball did not strike the detective, but its effect was almost as fatal.

It struck his horse, and the animal reared, plunged, and at length fell.

Meanwhile Tommy had put spurs and dashed on past the detective and was soon out of sight.

"A curse upon him for a stupid idiot!" muttered Thad, as he stood contemplating the wounded horse. "Whatever else he may be, he is an impetuous and plucky devil. But I'll get even with him yet."

An examination of the horse showed that, while he was not killed outright, he was so badly wounded that he would have to be shot, so, to put an end to the poor creature's agony, he put a bullet through its head.

He then removed the saddle and bridle and concealed them in the bushes at the roadside, and proceeded on foot as rapidly as possible.

Thad was a good pedestrian, and it did not take him long to reach the open space on the river bank.

But even that short time appeared too long, for neither the young horseman nor the boat was in sight.

What could have become of them?

It seemed impossible that either could have entirely disappeared so suddenly.

And yet they had.

It was in vain that he stood upon the river bank and strained his eyes in all directions up and down and across the river.

Not a soul could be seen.

But Thad was not satisfied to give up the search so easily.

There must be a rational solution of the mysterious disappearance, and he was determined to find it.

Just beyond the open space there was a rocky eminence, covered with timbers and jutting upon the river.

At this point there was a bend in the river, the wooded slope extending into the water like a key, and shutting off the view from the open space downward.

This afforded a cover for anything that might be going forward below.

But it was close upon half a mile to the end of this wooded point.

Could the parties have reached it in so brief a period?

Whether they could or had was only to be determined by investigating.

Without further reflection, therefore, he moved rapidly on.

Thad was about to take the highway, or public road, but, on chancing to glance in the direction of the river again, he noticed that there was a narrow road running along the river front.

A happy thought struck him.

Possibly this was the way the young horseman had gone, which accounted for his sudden and total disappearance.

As he hurried along the narrow path, which in many places was but a few inches from the water's brink, he noticed that the tide was coming in, and that in many places the water had already begun to lap over the path.

Nevertheless, he hurried on with all the speed he could summon.

After a little the path began to ascend so that it was several feet above the water's edge, and to grow so narrow that there was barely room for a single person to walk, and he abandoned the idea that the young man had gone along there with a horse.

But if he had not, thought Thad, where had he gone?

Further along the pathway widened out again into a broad, rocky ledge, but just ahead of him it seemed to terminate in an abrupt, perpendicular wall.

When he reached this wall a few mo-

ments later, however, he found that it was only an abrupt bend in the path.

From the point of the turn he could look across an expanse of water to where the path continued along the face of a sheer cliff, and for some distance was sheltered by an overhanging ledge or shelf, forming a complete grotto.

But this was not all the detective saw.

Pulled up to the edge of the ledge forming the pathway was a small boat, while within the grotto, although somewhat in the shadow, he could discern the forms of four men.

One of them, he could make out, had on a sailor uniform.

That he had run upon his man Thad had not the shadow of a doubt.

But how should he reach him?

And if he could succeed in reaching the spot, what could he do against four men, all of whom were doubtless armed to the teeth?

The latter question did not trouble him long.

Rushing along for some distance further, he came to where the road was already partially submerged by the rapidly rising tide, but he plunged in and hurried on.

The water did not cover the path to a depth of but a few inches, and presently the path ascended, so that the water did not touch it.

From the time he had passed the abrupt bend in the path, there was a jutting rock between him and the grotto, so that it and its occupants were completely concealed from view.

This continued for some time, so that it was impossible to tell how near he was coming to it.

At length he came to another abrupt turn, and on rounding it, found himself within a few feet of the grotto.

But two of the men had disappeared entirely, while the other two were in the boat and already some distance from the shore.

Neither of the men in the boat was either Tommy or the fugitive, but the two boatmen who had accompanied Avondale when Thad first spied them from the outlet of the cave.

But what had become of the other two?

There must be an outlet to the grotto somewhere.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HEMMED IN.

Thad at once set about searching for the outlet to the grotto by which Avondale and Watson made their escape.

A casual glance indicated that there was nothing back of him but the solid rocky wall, but his reason told him there must be an outlet somewhere.

Otherwise, how had the men escaped so effectually?

Beginning at one extreme end, therefore, he carefully examined every part of rock to the other extreme end.

But at the end of half an hour's search he was obliged to confess that if there was any such thing as an outlet, it was beyond his power of discovery.

He had never been more perplexed in his life.

He racked his brain for a solution of the mystery, and the cold perspiration stood out upon his brow, but he could conceive no way in which the fugitives could have got out of there.

Unless—

The proviso was suggested by something he saw just then.

In his perplexity, he had stepped to the edge of the ledge, and absently gazed off in the direction the boat had been going when he last saw it.

From this point his eyes moved mechanically toward the shore.

There, not a hundred yards away, was moored the little craft.

It was clear to him now.

The boat being too frail to carry all four of the men, Avondale and Watson had been carried over to the point, and the boatmen had afterwards come back for his companion.

At least this seemed a reasonable solution, and, indeed, was the only one.

But just then a more serious problem confronted the detective.

Chancing to look down at his feet, he saw that the water had risen to almost a level with the ledge.

He glanced back toward the wall apprehensively.

A glance was sufficient.

The green line more than a foot above his head indicated the height to which the water raised at flush tide.

An hour would suffice to bring it upon the ledge to a sufficient depth to involve him to the knees.

What was to be done?

Thad glanced back over the course he had come.

He recalled the fact that a portion of the path had been submerged when he came over it before.

The tide had grown two feet since then. It would be madness to attempt escape in that direction.

And yet there appeared to be no other.

Unless—

Again he glanced in the direction of the boat.

The distance was not great.

He had often swum twice as far.

What was to hinder him from doing it now?

It was his only alternative, and he would do it.

He could not remain where he was, for the water would soon overwhelm him.

Besides, he was reminded now, more forcibly than ever, that he had had no breakfast.

His appetite was becoming clamorous, and he was growing weak.

The latter thought caused him to hesitate about plunging into the water.

Would his strength sustain him for so long a swim under the circumstances.

He almost doubted it.

And just then an unforeseen thing happened.

The two boatmen had again taken their places in the boat and had already pushed off from shore.

This was the detective's only opportunity.

But would they come to his rescue?

There was no reason for their being unfriendly to him, even if they had been the allies of Avondale.

It was at least his last hope, and he would chance it.

He called.

The wind seemed to be unfavorable, or something.

The men did not appear to have heard, at least they did not heed.

He called again, this time at the full limit of his lung-power.

The men turned their heads and appeared greatly surprised to see him there, but finally nodded recognition and at once put the boat about.

A few minutes later they ran her prow upon the ledge.

"Whut in creation be ye doin' theer?" queried one.

"Nothing more than trying to get off just at present," replied Thad, jocosely. "I shall tell you later how I came to get on here."

"All right, cap'n," returned the boatman. "I put a leg over the gunwail an' we'll soon set ye on terry firmy."

Thad wanted no further invitation, and climbed in.

As they pulled away, the detective asked:

"What became of the other two men I saw with you?"

The men exchanged glances, and one of them said:

"Why, we put them ashore. Why do you ask?"

"I am after them, that is all."

"Whut be ye arter them chaps fer?"

"Why, the fellow in the sailor costume is a murderer, and the other fellow is, I suspect, his accomplice."

"Do tell!" exclaimed both men in a voice.

"Yes, I have been following that tall fellow for three days, now. Do you know which way they went?"

"Hain't no idee," returned the boatman.

"Did they not intimate where they were going?"

"Wal, the young fellow talked some 'bout goin' West—said he had five hundred dollars, and he'd pay all expenses of the trip."

"What did the other one say?"

"He said he was willin' to go anywhere so's to be away from here."

"Where did you pick the young man up?"

"There on the ledge where we found you."

"How did you come to put in there?"

"Why the young feller made some sort of a sign, and when the sailor seen it he seemed to know what it meant and asked us to row in, so we done so."

"How was it I only saw the trio of you when I first came on the rock?"

"Oh, the young feller, in his hurry to git in the boat, dropped his pistol, and didn't notice it until he got ashore, and then we had to go back arter it."

"When I first saw the young man he was on horseback. I wonder what he did with the horse?"

"He said somethin' 'bout leavin' a critter in the brush, and that he'd have to take it back to Sing Sing."

"Is that so?" cried Thad, enthusiastically.

"Yas."

"That is good. I may be able to over-haul him yet."

"An' t'other one, too."

"Is he going, too?"

"I reckon he is."

"That is still better. By the way, how did you come to pick up the sailor?"

The two men laughed.

"That's kinder queer," said one. "Si Jimison, whut keeps a resterant to Westchester, come to us last night and said theer was a friend o' his'n whut'd got into a little trouble 'bout suthin', and that he was a-hidin' in the big cave up theer in the Hook Mountain, and he wanted us to row round an' git him and take him summers—he didn't keer whur, an' he'd pay the bill. So we done it."

"What sort of a looking man is this Si Jimison, the restaurant keeper?"

"A tall, lanky sort o' chap, with sandy hair and chin whiskers."

"That is the man," exclaimed the detective, involuntarily.

It was one of the men whom he had overheard discussing the fugitive in the saloon of the hotel in Sing Sing.

"Whut?" drawled one of the boatmen.

"Nothing."

He was not aware that he had spoken his thoughts so loudly.

By this time the boatmen had set him upon shore, not at the point, but at the open space where he had left the dead horse.

He had but a short distance to walk from here, and, after paying the boatmen for their trouble, he shouldered the saddle and bridle and made his way back to the village.

Going direct to the livery stable he told them of the mishap, and paid for the horse—a good round price, at that, and then inquired if a certain young man had not got a horse there a few days before and just returned it.

"Yes," replied the liveryman, "and a nice young man he is. He never kicked on our price, and threw in a dollar for good measure."

"How long has it been since he was here?"

"Not more than twenty minutes, I should say."

"Anybody with him?"

"No, sir; he was alone."

"Did he say anything about where he was going from here?"

"Yes, he said—taking out his watch—that he must go, as he would only have about time enough to catch the New York train. His watch must have been fast, though, for there is still three minutes before that train goes."

"By George! Then I'll just have time to catch it," exclaimed Thad, rushing off like an electric current.

CHAPTER XIX.
VANISHED.

The detective never made better time as a pedestrian in his life, but even that was not sufficient for the emergency, for when he reached the depot the train was just moving out, and the worst of it was, the next train did not pass for an hour.

"I have it," he suddenly exclaimed, with the energy of an inspiration, and he rushed up to the ticket window.

"Sell tickets to two men just now—one short, red hair—other tall, dressed in sailor costume?" he panted.

"Yes, b'lieve I did."

"Where to?"

"New York, I think."

"Thanks. Train reaches there 'bout 'n hour, don't it?"

"Bout 'n hour."

Thad rushed over to the telegraph operator's window, which was in the same room, and, seizing a blank, he hastily wrote:

"To policeman in charge Grand Central Depot, New York city:

"Hold two men on in-coming passenger, No. 35. One tall, good-looking, brown hair and mustache, dressed in sailor costume, name, Robert Avondale; other, short, thick-set, red hair and slight mustache, same color, name not known.

(Signed) "THADDEUS BURR,
"for Central Office."

"Will see what effect that will have," he mused, as he handed the despatch to the operator. "If there is not another wreck I ought to get him this time."

Then came an hour of suspense.

At the conclusion of that time he was in a greater state of anxiety than ever.

Expecting his train every instant, and at the same time expecting—and wondering why it did not arrive—a telegram from the Central Depot policeman, announcing that he had arrested his man.

And, just as his train rolled into the station, he remembered that Avondale had got on at Kingsbridge when he started West.

Would he not be likely to get off at the same station?

This was as likely as anything else, and the detective had been thrown off the track by the simple trick of buying tickets to the Grand Central Depot.

It was too late to telegraph again, so all he could do was to take the train for the city and run the chance of picking up another clew.

An hour later he stepped upon the platform of the Grand Central Depot.

Depot Detective Duffy came forward smiling and extended his hand.

"Oi have yer min for yez, Mr. Burr," said he.

Thad almost staggered under the shock of surprise.

"You don't mean to tell me?"

"Sure, and Oi do that same."

"The tall man with the sailor costume and the short fellow with red hair?"

"Thim's the fellers, and it was a haird toime o' had pickin' them out."

"How was that, Ned?"

"Whoy, sor, wan av them was in wan chair and wan in another, bad luck to them."

"That is strange. However, it was probably a ruse to throw us off the scent. Where are the prisoners?"

"Oi have thim in here," replied the Irishman, leading the way. "Oi thought Oi wouldn't take thim down till yez kin and oindifoid thim."

"That was sensible, but there is little chance of your having made a mistake."

Thad followed his conductor along for some distance, up a pair of winding stairs or two, along an interminable gallery, and finally into a narrow passage which terminated in a small room.

The room had been used as a private baggage room at some time or other, but had of late been utilized as a lock-up for petty offenders who were arrested about the depot, to be held for an hour or so pending the arrival of some one to identify them; but it had never before reached the dignity of being used for the detention of an alleged murderer.

The station detective unlocked the door, swung it open and stepped aside for Thad to view the prisoners.

Thad could but smile at the careless manner in which the Irishman treated such important criminals.

But a moment later his merriment was turned into chagrin.

There, sure enough, was a sailor, a half-drunk, disreputable-looking fellow, who bore as much resemblance to Avondale as to the Goddess of Liberty; and there was also an innocent-looking Swede, with fiery red hair, and unable to speak a word of English.

Thad turned upon the grinning, expectant Irishman with an unmistakable glower of disapproval.

"Ain't they the min?" ventured the station detective.

"About as near it as I am to the Czar of Russia," growled Thad. "I should have thought you would have known better than to have held these men on the description I sent."

"But, the wan av them has sailor clothes and the other red hair?"

"Undoubtedly, and if you'll go down about the docks you'll find any number of men with sailor clothes on, and plenty more with red hair."

"These is not the min, thin?"

"No!" and Thad marched indignantly out.

When he got down-stairs he found a train ready to start West, and jumped aboard, and rode as far as Kingsbridge station.

He entertained very little hope of getting any trace of his man after this lapse of time, but there was nothing else to be done just then, and it was necessary in his state of mind to keep moving.

As he more than half expected, no one had noticed any persons of the description he gave leaving the train.

"There is one more chance for me," he reflected, as he boarded a train to go down-town again. "If the fellow is in town he will be most likely to go home to get another look at his wife and child before departing for good. I shall go there at once."

And he did, but it was only to discover that the place was already under the surveillance of Central Office men.

Thad now appeared to be at about the end of his tether.

"There is no use working that lead any further. I must strike a new one."

He recalled what Tommy Watson had hinted about Ned Paschal.

"Let me see," he reflected. "I wonder if that scoundrel hasn't had something to do with this business. Now that I recall it, that young jackanapes hinted pretty plainly that he had. And, come to think of it, the widow Lonsdale's diamonds were stolen the same night of the murder, and she is a neighbor of the murdered man."

"I have it," he exclaimed, slapping his knee enthusiastically. "Ned Paschal stole those diamonds, and then—but how the deuce came he in Marboro's house?"

"Oh, I see! Marboro was a gambler, why not a crook? That is it! They were working the job together, quarreled over the division of the spoils and Paschal or Avondale, who was also in the plot, shot Marboro. Oh, why did I not make friends with that young chap? He would have told me everything."

The following day the detective spent in endeavoring to chase up a clew to the location of the Spider, but was unsuccessful.

The evening following he paid a visit to Mrs. Avondale.

To his surprise she did not appear very much cast down, and he suspected from that that her husband was not far off.

But before he had time to question her with regard to it, she said:

"I have just had a telegram from my husband."

"Ah!" ejaculated Thad, greatly surprised. "I suppose it is not worth while asking you where he is?"

"Yes, I don't mind telling you. He is on his way to California. He is accom-

panied by a young man who tells me he is innocent."

"Why, then, does he run away to California, if he is innocent? Why does he not remain here and prove his innocence?"

"Ah, sir, it is one thing to know that you are innocent and quite another to prove it. When the facts come to light and the guilty party is found, my husband will come back."

"Very likely," rejoined the detective.

"Now, sir, why don't you, instead of wasting your time hunting down my poor husband, who is innocent, try to find the real criminals and thereby establish my husband's innocence and restore him to his family?"

"Madam, so I shall. From this moment I shall devote myself to tracing that crime to the real perpetrator, for, like yourself, I believe your husband innocent."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" cried the woman, grasping his hand spasmodically. "I have no money, but God will reward you for this noble task!"

CHAPTER XX.

GONE WEST.

It is no matter for wonder that Thad failed to discover any trace of Avondale and Tommy after they left Sing Sing.

It was true that they had taken a train—they had even bought a ticket for New York, but they had not gone in that direction.

They were too sharp for that.

The fact is, they had gone West.

After Tommy had succeeded in meeting the fugitive and convinced him of his innocence, the latter was for returning to New York at once, proclaiming his innocence, and setting about finding the real criminal.

But Tommy, although much the younger man, saw the indiscretion of such a move.

"No," said he, "not yet. You must remain away for a while. Wait till the excitement dies down a little, and in the mean time maybe the police will discover something."

"I do not believe they ever will," sighed Avondale, despondently. "They will only be able to see the facts as they appear to everybody—as they appeared to me, in fact."

"Nevertheless, it will do no harm to keep out of sight for a week or so, and we can see by that time which way the wind blows."

"But where can I go? They will soon hunt me out of these parts."

"That is true, it won't do to stay around here, for even if the detectives fail to run you down, a still worse enemy will."

"Who is that?"

"Ned Paschal's gang."

"Why should they wish to find me?"

"Because as long as you are alive you are a menace to the leader of the gang, who is the real murderer, as I told you."

"But do you think they would ever find me out here?"

"Didn't you see that fellow that was after you?"

"Yes."

"Well, who do you imagine he was?"

"A detective?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Who then?"

"One of Ned Paschal's gang."

"Are you sure?"

"I have his own word for it."

Avondale shuddered.

"This is hard. But what can I do?"

Where can I go?"

"West—to California—anywhere."

"That is all very well, my young friend. But are you aware that I have not more than a couple of dollars in my pocket at this moment?"

"That makes no difference," cried Tommy, proudly, taking out a fat roll of bills. "I have plenty for all our needs. I have the best part of five hundred dollars here, and that ought to carry us through."

"You are very kind, my boy, but I could not think of using your money."

"My dear sir, you will allow me to

have something to say about that. I came out to pull you out of a hole, which, to tell you the truth, I had a good deal to do with getting you into, and I shall brook no interference with my plans, even from you."

This seemed to settle it, for Avondale offered no further resistance, and they returned to Sing Sing, where, at Tommy's suggestion, they took the train for the West.

They wisely refrained from buying tickets, and paid their fares to the conductor, thus avoiding leaving this trace behind them.

Their objective point was California, but, considering that Tommy's money might not hold out for so long a trip, they decided to stop off at Kansas City.

"We will be just as safe there as on the Pacific Slope," remarked Avondale.

"Yes, if they start after us at all it will be no more trouble for them to go to San Francisco than come here. Besides, I have a scheme which will serve to make them think we have gone out there."

"What is that?"

"I have a friend in San Francisco who is a telegraph operator, and, as I am also one, I will send him a despatch in cipher, telling him when to send a despatch to New York, informing them that we are in San Francisco."

"That is a good idea. But whom will you send the despatch to?"

"Let me see—I hardly know—"

"I have it," interrupted the colonel. "Send it to my wife. It will be a relief to her to know that I am safe, and, as the detectives will be prying about, they will be sure to get hold of it."

"That is true, and that is what we shall do."

The friends did not go to a hotel, for the double reason of economy and to avoid notice; they went to a private boarding house.

This house was on Main street, below Fourth, where the street is cut through the bluff to reach the river, so that the third story at the rear of the house was on a level with the ground. Their room was on the third story.

For the first week they did not go out much, and then only after dark.

One evening they were taking a stroll after supper.

They went in the direction of the river.

The bluffs on each side of the road rose to an altitude of over fifty feet, and, as the street lamps occurred only every half-block, it was pretty dark—too dark, in fact, to see an object distinctly for a great distance.

They had grown careless and indifferent, in their security, and ceased to take the precaution to look about them on leaving the house which they had at first.

Besides, they were busily engaged in conversation and oblivious to what was going on about them.

Scarcely half a block had been gone—they had not yet reached the first cross street, when Tommy's quick ear caught the sound of footsteps.

They were so close to them that it seemed impossible that the person could have followed them.

He must have been lying in wait.

But how should anybody know which way they intended going?

All this flashed through Tommy's mind in the fraction of a minute.

And then he drew and cocked his revolver, and Avondale followed his example.

Whoever the parties were, they must have noticed this precaution on the part of our friends, for the next instant their footsteps could be heard receding.

They went in the direction of the river, and a moment later our friends saw them pass under the street lamp at the next corner.

It was impossible to distinguish what they resembled, but it could be seen that there were four of them.

Tommy and his companion did not speak for a minute or so, but it was evident they were both thinking the same thing from the remarks which ensued.

"I wonder who they were?" gasped Avondale, in a tremulous voice.

"That is what I would like to know."

"You do not think they can be—"

"I was trying to settle that in my own mind. It may be, after all, though, that they are only a gang of local ruffians."

"You do not think they are any of the Paschal gang?"

"I—I—hope not, but—why, no; it is hardly likely. It is not likely that they have discovered where we are so soon."

"But, allowing that they are local thugs, do you imagine they had any designs upon us?"

"It looked that way to me—although that might have been the result of an over-wrought imagination."

"At all events do you not think it would be as well for us to give up our walk and return to the house?"

"Are you afraid?"

"No, but it is just as well to be on the safe side."

His voice and manner, nevertheless, betrayed that Avondale was afraid.

Tommy made no further comment on the fact, and they returned in comparative silence to the boarding house.

Being a lonesome sort of place, especially as they had made no acquaintances in the house, the two men went direct to their room.

But they did not go to bed.

Their late adventure, slight as it was, had rendered them too nervous for that.

So they sat talking till a late hour.

The house had grown still, and it was evident that everybody was in bed.

It was long after midnight, a late hour for this place.

Suddenly Tommy put up his hand as a signal for silence.

Avondale was speaking at the moment. He ceased, and all became still.

Both men listened.

"What is it?" whispered Avondale, at length.

"Somebody walking in the hall."

"Probably some one connected with the house."

"I hardly think so. In my opinion—sh-sh!"

"What?"

"There it is again!"

Tommy had risen and approached the door.

The sound was distinct enough now.

It was like the muffled tread of half a dozen men, vainly endeavoring to walk noiselessly.

Both men drew their revolvers and stood expectant.

A minute passed.

It was a minute of intense suspense, for during it not a sound was heard.

There was a vigorous knock at the door.

CHAPTER XXI.

RUDE VISITORS.

Tommy glanced hastily back at Avondale, who stood directly behind him.

The latter was pale, but resolute.

Tommy's eyes plainly asked him what he should do, and those of Avondale seemed to answer back to stand firm, but not to open the door.

And then, lest the boy should fail to understand, he stepped alongside and whispered, nervously:

"Don't open it. Let them break it down if they will; in that case we will have the advan—"

But the latter part of his sentence was drowned by the din of a second vigorous knock.

"What, after all, if it should be somebody we want to see?" ventured Tommy.

"Not likely at this hour. Besides—let them speak, and—"

Here came another tremendous series of thumps.

This was quickly followed by a gruff voice.

"Colonel Bob!—Tommy Watson!" it said, "let me in. I have good news for you."

"Now I am sure it is no one connected with the house," whispered Avondale.

"That's so. Nobody this side of the Mississippi knows those names—unless it is some one from New York."

"Let me in, I say!", repeated the voice, a shade gruffly this time.

Neither man made any reply.

Another thump at the door, and then:

"Let me in, I tell you! I must see you at once! If you do not open the door I shall break it down."

"What if it should be the police?" whispered Tommy. "We shouldn't resist them."

"Resist anybody!" cried Avondale, desperately.

Tommy made no reply, but the set expression of determination showed that the policy of his comrade suited him to the letter.

He turned his face to the door again and waited.

Meanwhile the knocking and the demands for admission continued.

"It won't take them long at that rate to splinter that door," observed Tommy.

"It is a wonder that they don't hear it down-stairs."

"Possibly they do—and possibly they are in league with these villains."

"That's so—if it's the police," gasped Avondale. "There's the reward, you know!"

"Great Heaven! Yes! That is what it is. Shall we let them in?"

"Never!"

"Never's the word," said Tommy, calmly, "but—"

At that instant there was a tremendous crash.

It was as if a powerful battering-ram had been hurled against the door.

The frail structure split in twain and the remains flew open.

But Tommy was not to be taken unaware.

He had expected this climax, and was prepared for it.

Following so closely upon the crash as to seem to be its echo, came a second.

But it was the crash of Tommy's revolver.

And it was quickly followed by the report of Colonel Bob's weapon.

A howl of pain rent the air outside the door, and the half dozen dark faces which had appeared at the opening when the door crashed down vanished.

Whether in the smoke of the pistols or into the gloom of the unlighted hall could not at once be ascertained.

But the sound of flying feet, as of a stampeding mob along the hall an instant later satisfied our friends that they had succeeded in terrorizing their enemies, whoever they might be.

Then there was a moment of silence.

Tommy glanced back at his comrade.

His face wore an expression of relief, and the friends exchanged smiles of satisfaction.

"I wonder if they've got enough?" smiled Tommy.

"We've got them on the run, anyway."

"I wonder how much damage we did them?"

Tommy put his head timidly out of the door.

The hall was too dark to see anything.

"Take the lamp," suggested Avondale.

And, suiting the action to the word, stepped to the table and picked up a smoky kerosene lamp, the only means of lighting there was in the room.

An instant later he held it out in the hall.

Both men peered out cautiously, almost fearfully.

Nobody was to be seen, not even a dead man.

"Thank God! We did not kill any one!" said Avondale, with a sigh of relief.

Just then Tommy happened to glance along the hall and saw several scared faces peering from partly open doors.

At length one man ventured forth timidly in his night clothes.

"What's the racket?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothing," responded Tommy, indifferently. "A little serenade, that's all."

"Who was that doin' the shootin'?" questioned the other, waxing bolder.

"Give it up. Is it the fashion out here to have this kind of visitors at this time of night?"

The fellow stared, and finally asked: "Burglars?"

"That is what I should like to know. If they were, it is strange they should come to our room. We have nothing for burglars. Besides, I don't see how they came all the way up through the house without arousing any one."

"Tain't likely they came in that way."

"How else could they get in?"

"The same way they went out."

"How was that?"

"Right through the back door."

At this hint, Tommy, followed by his friend, rushed through the hall to the back door.

A peep out was sufficient to astonish them.

Stretching away on a level with the doorstep a grassy common sparkled with dewy brightness in the moonlight.

They had never had occasion to go to the back door before, and knew nothing of this phenomenon of nature.

"But how did they get up?" questioned Tommy, curiously.

"Why, the common is on a level with the street at a higher part of the town," explained one of the boarders.

"What's all this?" queried the landlady, just then arriving on the spot, out of breath from climbing three flights of stairs.

"Burglars," explained several of the boarders, in a breath.

"Burglars?" cried the landlady, in great consternation.

And so it was settled among them.

Neither Avondale nor Tommy offered any further explanation, but they returned to their room after the excitement had somewhat subsided, with the firm belief that either the landlady or somebody else in the house knew more about the affair than they would have cared to tell.

Indeed, the matter might have remained a mystery even to them had it not been for a peculiar discovery.

When the friends returned to their room, Tommy, still eager to discover some clew to the mystery, took up the lamp which the colonel had put down upon the table before going to the back door, and made a careful search of the hall in the vicinity of the door where the men had stood.

He had not searched long before he was rewarded by a discovery.

It was a small, black, silk-covered button, with the initial "I" embroidered on it in dark red silk thread.

"That explains it," he remarked, returning to the room and holding the button up to the light for his companion's inspection. "That tells who the attacking party were."

Avondale took the button and examined it curiously.

"Why, what is it?" he asked.

"One of the gang's badges."

"What is the 'I' for?"

"Paschal, of course."

"Is that the gang's badge?"

Tommy took a similar button from his pocket.

"Here is the one they gave me when I was initiated," he said.

"Then you or I must have shot that button off."

"Possibly, though it might have been torn off in the fellow's haste to escape."

"Well, there is but one thing for us to do," sighed the colonel.

"What is that?"

"Move."

"Yes, we must get out of here the first thing in the morning."

"Where shall we go?"

"My notion is St. Louis. They will expect us to go further West, and we shall fool them by going in the opposite direction."

"And we must disguise."

"Yes, we must disguise."

CHAPTER XXII.

ANOTHER MOVE.

Avondale and Tommy were somewhat perplexed regarding the matter of disguising themselves.

They were up early and, finding a costumer in the town, procured the necessary articles, but the trouble was about putting them on.

"If we are seen going out of the house in our new make-up," observed Tommy, "they will take us for a couple of those burglars and put the police onto us."

"Unless we slip away unobserved," suggested the colonel.

"That is so, and we can do it, too. We'll pay our bill and take leave of the landlady, and then go up to our room with the alleged intention of getting our clothing, when we will disguise ourselves and walk out the back way the same as the rascals did last night."

This idea was carried out, and another hour saw them clear of the house and on their way to the depot.

Any one seeing them now would never have suspected that they were the same men who had come to the town a little over a week before.

"We may congratulate ourselves on one thing," said Tommy, "those fellows will never recognize us in the world, even if they should happen to see us."

"I am sure of that, and if we can only give them the slip for another week I think it will be safe for us to venture back to New York in these disguises."

"Yes, in these disguises, I think it will."

This conversation took place after the train started.

It was followed by a short silence, during which each was absorbed in meditation.

Avondale had become so absorbed as to have forgotten where he was, when his companion nudged him.

"What do you think of the two fellows sitting over there in the fourth seat on the right hand side of the aisle?" he whispered.

"The rough-looking chaps?"

"Yes."

"Oh, they look to me to be typical Missourians."

"That is what they look—but are they?"

"I should say they were. I see no reason for thinking them anything else."

"Well, in my opinion they are nothing of the kind."

"You don't imagine," faltered the colonel, turning a trifle pale, "that—"

"That is exactly what I believe, and I propose to find out for certain before we go much further."

"Do you imagine they have recognized us?"

"That is just the point. From the manner in which they have been watching us ever since we entered the car, I believe they have."

"Great Heaven! Is there no such thing as eluding these rascals? Still, you may be mistaken."

"I may, that is true, and that is my reason for wishing to find out."

"How are you going about it?"

"Watch me."

Tommy watched until he caught the eye of one of the rascals, and threw him one of the signs of the order.

A look of utter amazement in the fellow's face was the result, and, nudging his companion, he whispered something to him in an excited manner, and then the other looked over at Tommy with a perplexed countenance.

"I thought I was not mistaken," smiled the young man, "and now they are wondering who I am."

"Did they answer your sign?"

"No, and that is the funniest part of it. They are evidently scared out of their wits. Now, I have another scheme."

"What is that?"

"When the conductor comes through again let us get a stop-over ticket, and then get off at the next station after that. We will not get off until the train is about to start, and we shall then make sure whether these chaps are on our track or not."

The stop-over tickets were accordingly procured, and at the very next station the two men waited until the bell had rung for the train to start, when they sud-

denly sprang up, ran to the platform and jumped off.

They had no more than touched the platform when the two mysterious men were after them.

The latter affected to pay no attention to our friends, but were obviously taking good care to keep them in sight.

Avondale and Tommy, having an hour to wait for the next train, walked about the station to kill time, and vainly endeavored to get far enough away from their shadowers to talk with safety.

But this seemed impossible, for the fellows were constantly upon their heels.

At length Tommy lost his patience.

"I'm going to have it out once for all with these fellows," he said. "We've got to have a scrap with them sooner or later, and we may as well have it out first as last."

This he had uttered in a whisper, and then, before either they or Avondale could divine what he was about to do, he turned suddenly, as they were dogging his steps, and came face to face with them.

They endeavored to avoid him, still affecting not to notice him, but he quickly stepped in front of them and demanded:

"What do you fellows want with me, anyway?"

Both men regarded him with a contemptuous sneer, but made no answer.

"Answer my question!" he commanded, savagely. "I know that you are following us, and if you want anything out of us, say the word, and you can have it!"

Still no answer, and still the scornful curl of the lip.

"Curse you! If you don't answer my question, I'll make you."

And Tommy whipped out his revolvers and shoved one into each of their faces.

But Tommy had misjudged his game.

Quicker than a flash the two men dropped to almost a squatting position, so as to bring their heads out of range of his pistols, and at the same instant drew their own revolvers.

The next instant they sprang to their feet again and fired as they arose.

But their shots did no damage, for at that moment a stalwart Missourian, who had been watching the episode, stepped forward and, with a terrific blow of his powerful fist knocked the weapons upward, so that their charges were spent in the air.

And just then the east-bound train came rolling in, merely came to a stop, and rolled out again.

But not without our two friends on board, although they had to run for it.

As soon as they were safely aboard they looked about for the shadowers, but if they had got aboard, they must have got into another car.

This caused Avondale and Tommy some uneasiness.

"I wonder if those fellows caught this train," said Tommy. "I shall see!"

And Tommy left his seat and proceeded through the various cars on a tour of inspection.

In a few minutes he returned with a smile of satisfaction.

"We've left them behind this time. That wasn't a bad trick, after all."

"No, if we have left them behind."

"There can be no doubt of it. I have been through every car and scrutinized every face."

"I trust you may not be mistaken," said the colonel, doubtfully.

"This will give us a chance to reach St. Louis far enough ahead of them to secure quarters in some obscure place where they will never be able to find us."

Tommy's theory seemed to be correct, for the remainder of the journey was made without the reappearance of the shadowers, much to our friends' satisfaction.

It was ten o'clock at night when they reached St. Louis, and, after looking about to make sure that they were not followed, they proceeded directly to an obscure hotel which Tommy knew of, on Twelfth street, near Olive.

Here they registered under fictitious names and went directly to their room.

And to avoid the very possibility of discovery, for that night at least, they had their supper sent to their room.

"I guess we've given them the slip this time," chuckled Tommy. "It cannot be possible that they can ferret us out in this place."

"No, it does not seem possible."

"Those names, Soper and Paddington, will puzzle them if they come to examine the register."

"Yes, unless they happen to know your handwriting, Tommy."

The young man turned pale.

He had signed the membership roll of the rogues' society. Possibly they might recognize his chirography.

Just then there was a knock at the door and a bell-boy announced that a couple of gentlemen wished to see Mr. Soper and Mr. Paddington.

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed Tommy, excitedly. "They've recognized it, colonel, and we are lost."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CLOSE CALL.

"What's to be done?" queried Tommy. "Let the boy tell them we have retired and can't be seen to-night."

"But that will only defer matters. They will see us to-morrow."

"Not necessarily. We can be out if they call."

Then addressing the boy:

"Tell the gentlemen that we are very tired and about to retire. Ask them to call any time to-morrow. Tell them to say at what hour they will call, and also tell them that we must know their names."

"Yessir," answered the boy, and departed.

Very soon he returned, however, with the message that the gentlemen's names were "Mr. Jones and Mr. Smith," and that they must see Mr. Soper and Mr. Paddington that very night.

"Just tell them," returned Tommy, "that we know nobody by either the name of Jones or Smith."

"And tell them," added Avondale, "not to send any more messages to-night, as we shall receive none."

"Yessir."

And once more the boy departed.

But even then he returned before very long with the announcement that the gentlemen would see them to-night, and would not take "no" for an answer.

"There is no answer," said Tommy, dryly.

"Sir?"

"Tell those fellows that you found us in bed, and that we send no reply to their message. That ought to settle them," he added, after the boy was gone.

"If it don't, a cool snub certainly will, and that is what he will get if he sends the boy back again."

"At the same time," reflected Tommy, "I am very curious to know who these parties are, and I have a notion to go down and see."

"I shouldn't if I were you."

"They can do me no harm, even if they recognize me, which is not likely."

Accordingly, the young man made some alterations in his disguise and went down-stairs.

The two men, whom he had no difficulty in recognizing as the same he had seen on the train and afterward left on the platform, as he thought, were still there, in hot discussion with the clerk, and it was evident that they were under the influence of liquor.

They were vehemently insisting upon going up-stairs, and the clerk was on strenuously protesting against their doing anything of the kind.

Finally the discussion grew so hot that the clerk ordered the men out of the house, and, as they refused to go, had them put out.

In the meantime they had not noticed Tommy, who had sauntered in and stood near enough to hear the conversation, but in a position where they could not see him.

When they were expelled from the hotel Tommy could not content himself until he had seen where they would go, and followed them.

They stood in a dark place not far from the hotel talking for some time and Tommy got near enough to hear a portion of their conversation.

"I tell you it must be done to-night," asserted one.

"But don't you see that such a thing is impossible?" responded the other. "If we had done as I suggested, secured a room on the same floor, we could have worked it all right, but even that is impossible now, and the only thing for us is to wait our chance."

"There might be a scheme," said the other, reflectively, after a silence of some moments.

"What is that?"

"Make a charge against them before the police and get them arrested."

"What good would that do?"

"It would do a good deal of good if the charge was serious enough to induce these yahoos out here to lynch them."

"Oh, but it would be necessary to prove something and that would be rather difficult."

"That's so. Well, let us go. We may as well give it up to-night, I suppose."

They walked away down Olive street in the direction of the river, and Tommy, still eager to know more of their intended movements, followed.

They kept down this street till they reached Seventh street, and here turned north as far as the notorious locality of Lucas avenue, and here, not far from the corner, entered a vicious dive known as "Under the Willows."

The men had scarcely had time to get inside, it seemed to him, and he was still deliberating upon the policy of following them, when the young man received a dull, heavy blow on the back of the head, rendering him unconscious.

How long Tommy remained in this condition he had no means of knowing, but when he returned to consciousness, he found himself lying on a hard floor, and surrounded by darkness.

The sound of loud, boisterous voices and the click of billiard balls below convinced him that he was in a room directly over the resort he was contemplating entering.

Tommy arose with some difficulty, and groped about in the darkness and soon ran against the wall.

He then stopped and listened.

In spite of the din below he could hear heavy breathing, which appeared to be but a few feet away.

He felt in his pockets for a match, and, luckily, found several. Lighting one and holding it aloft, he discovered the source of the sound of breathing.

Sitting at a table, with his head resting upon it, was one of the russians, sound asleep. In front of him was a bottle and glass. Also a pair of revolvers.

Tommy grasped the situation at a glance.

The fellow had been left there as a guard over him (Tommy).

Gliding softly to his side he cautiously appropriated the revolvers and slipped them into his pockets.

Then lighting another match he began the search for a way out.

He soon discovered that there was but one door, and that was securely locked and the key removed.

"This fellow must have the key," he argued to himself, and groped his way back to where the fellow sat.

It did not take long to discover that the man's slumber was so profound that nothing short of a dynamite explosion would arouse him, and Tommy set to ransacking his pockets with impunity.

He had not long to search, however, for the key was in a side pocket of his coat.

Tommy then took a piece of strong cord which he also found in the fellow's pocket, and, drawing his wrists behind him, bound them securely together.

Next removing a cotton handkerchief from about the ruffian's neck, he drew it

through his mouth and tied it firmly behind his head.

"That will keep him quiet and out of danger," he mused, "and now I shall proceed to make my escape."

Unlocking and opening the door, he found himself in a dark passage.

He did not dare to light a match lest it might betray him, besides the light from the street coming in at a small window at the end of the hall rendered it possible for him to get down-stairs.

So, relocking the door, lest some one might come along and molest his friend, the guard, he made his way down-stairs.

The street door being unlocked he opened it and stepped out.

As he did so he found a man standing on the stoop in the act of pulling the bell handle.

There was a mutual recognition and surprise at the same time.

"What, colonel?" gasped Tommy, "what are you doing here?"

"Why, I came in response to your note," replied Avondale, with a puzzled expression. "But after what you told me in that note I am surprised to see you here."

"My note?" cried Tommy, in surprise. "I sent no note—how could I? But let us get away from here before we talk."

They hurried away from the spot, and not until they had reached their room did they resume the subject they had started upon.

"You spoke of a note?" began Tommy.

"Yes, here it is."

And Avondale handed him a slip of paper.

It read:

"Dear Colonel—I am at 730 Lucas avenue—have the enemy at bay, and, with your assistance, can corral them. Come at once. Ring bell and I will let you in. Can't leave for watching the game."

"Sincerely,

"TOMMY WATSON."

"Pretty clever," commented the young man, after perusing the note, "but you should not have been caught by it. Don't you see it is not my writing?"

"I see now, but in my excitement I did not notice the fact before."

"Colonel, we must get out of here, and now is the best time to do it."

"To-night?"

"Yes, at once."

"Where now?"

"New York."

"Agreed," exclaimed Avondale.

Twenty minutes later they were again on the move.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A NEW LEAD.

"W'ot's de matter, Spider? Ye're looking as glum to-night as a man's w'ot's married his mudder-in-law by mistake. W'ot's eatin' yer vittals?"

The Spider groaned, but vouchsafed no reply.

"I see how 'tis," pursued the Patriarch. "Ye're worryin' 'bout dat young bloke givin' us de shake. Wal, it is kinder nerve-testin'—for youse, Spider."

The Spider shifted in his seat and cleared his throat impatiently.

"If de young snoozer sh'd take it: inter his fool head ter split 'bout dat Marboro business and de diamond—"

"Patriarch!" snarled Paschal, "will you do me the favor of keeping that cussed old fly trap of yours closed?"

"Sartain, Spider," rejoined the old man, with a low chuckle. "Thar ain't nuthin' I wouldn't do for me dear friend, and dat's jest de reason I'm kinder worried myself 'bout dat young dandy. Yer see dere's a chance—I t'ink it'd be jest like de young fool, ter go an' hunt up dat feller Colonel Bob and put him onto do-whole racket."

"What the blazes would be his motive for that?"

"Blest if I know. Yer kin never 'count for young fellers' actions, ye know. Dey're kinder tender hearted and squeamish 'bout t'ings. I noticed he was kinder

restless de last night; kept talkin' in his sleep. And de nex' day he comes to me an' says dat it was dead wrong to 'low de blame to rest on dat udder man w'ot never done it. And I t'ought den dat it wouldn't take much to make de young bloke peach."

"Don't you think it more probable that he will go direct to the police?"

"Not him."

"Why not?"

"He'd be afeared to do dat—afeared dat de gang 'ud do him up. But he t'inks he kin tell de udder chap and let him do de dirty work."

The Spider arose impatiently and began pacing the floor.

"A curse upon your eternal evil surmising, Patriarch," he growled. "You would make an angel in paradise apprehensive of the permanence of his position, and wish he were in the other place."

"Not onless I seen dat dere was underhand work goin' on 'mong de udder angels dat was likely to upset him. But ye see dis young feller was powerful tender of conscience, and was suivilin' to me 'bout de man's wife and tender infant. I tell yer w'en a feller gits dat fur gone dat women's tears and kids' cryin' 'feets him, he's no good in our business. He'll jist git dat Colonel Bob worked up till he'll come back here and—"

"This is all cussed rot, Patriarch! There is not a ghost of a reason for supposing that Colonel Bob is alive."

"Dat's so. Dere is no good reason for t'inkin' so. But s'pose he was, and—"

"Well, let us first discover some reason for supposing that he escaped death in the wreck. It will then be time enough to speculate upon the consequences."

"Dat's so. Dere's no hurry."

"Patriarch!" screeched Paschal, frantically, "do you wish to drive me crazy? What do you know about this affair, anyway?"

"Nuthin'."

"You know something, I am positive of that, and you shall tell me!" roared the Spider, in a towering rage, approaching the Patriarch menacingly.

"Shall's a very blunt word, Spider. It's a very good word to 'ply to children, but not to folks, an' w'en it comes to 'plyin' it to de Patriarch, w'y, yer might's well order de tide not to rise or de wind to stop blowing. And w'en yer t'ink o' skeerin' de old man, why, yer might as well go and holler 'shoo' at de 'Lentic Ocean."

"There, then, Patriarch, dear old friend," coaxed the Spider, conciliatorily, realizing that he had gone too far, "I didn't mean anything. You know I wouldn't harm you for the world."

"I know blame well yer wouldn't," retorted the old man, sarcastically, "'cause yer ain't got it in yer clothes to hurt me. See?"

"Of course not," said the Spider, with a forced laugh. "But tell me—that is a dear, good friend—what have you heard or what do you know about this affair? Is Avondale living or not?"

The old man hesitated.

He had not ceased rankling over the insult he had received, and was not to be placated so readily.

"Please tell me. Forgive me for what I said, old friend. You understand how irritated I was, and how nervous I naturally am over that unfortunate murder."

"Yas, I knows yer was, but yer had no business threatenin' de old man."

"No, I know I had not. But let us forget that, and do, please, tell me about this other matter."

At length the old man said:

"Yer won't threaten de old man no more if he tells yer?"

"Never."

"Nor say nuttin' 'bout dem diamonds?"

"Oh, say, this is hardly a square deal, Patriarch," protested Paschal. "It was to be an equal divide. It would hardly be fair treatment for either myself or the others for you to keep them all."

The Patriarch chuckled.

"Tain't worth nuttin', den, to know dis w'ot I'm 'bout tellin' yer?"

"Oh, yes; I'm willing to divvy handsomely for the information."

"To w'ot extent?"

"Oh, I don't know, it depends upon how much you know and how important the information is."

"Yer don't t'ink dat your share o' de diamonds 'ud be 'bout right, do yer, Spider?"

"Oh, say; this is outrageous! I am positive the information is worth no such price as that."

"Dat 'pends, o' course, on w'ot value yer put on yer life, Splder. Some folks I s'pose, wouldn't give much for it, but being yer own yer might rate it higher. I know one t'ing, if w'ot I heer's true, and de parties carries out w'ot dey've planned fer, I wouldn't give yer a Bowery brilliant for yer soul, wid all de trimmin' trowed in. See?"

"For God's sake, what is it, Patriarch?" cried Paschal.

"Purt'y bad."

"Tell me, for God's sake!"

"And de diamonds?"

"Oh, Patriarch, you are too hard on me!"

"Not as hard as de 'lectric chair 'ud be!"

"You will drive me distracted."

"Dunno but dat 'ud be de best t'ing for yer. Yer could plead de insanity dodge den."

"Are you going to tell me or not?" begged the Spider.

"Dat 'pends."

"On what?"

"De divvy! De diamonds."

Paschal paced the floor.

It was a hard point for him to decide.

He disliked dreadfully to give up his interest in the diamonds, and yet from the hints thrown out by the old man, he did not know but his life might depend upon the information.

At length, growing desperate, he said:

"Well, tell me, Patriarch. You always would have the lion's share."

"Does de diamonds go?"

"Yes—for God's sake tell me!"

"Wal, it's dis. De young cove w'ot we nishyated t'udder night, as I told yer, had a kinder of a collapse o' conscience, and started off in search o' Avondale wid de idea o' tellin' him dat he wasn't guilty, and bringin' him back to testify 'gin' youse—"

"Did he tell you he was going?" interrupted the Spider.

"Nope, but he sent me a note, tellin' me dat he was agoin'."

"Why did you not tell me of this sooner?" roared Paschal.

"'Cause I don't give valooble information for nuttin'."

"However, there is no evidence that Avondale is not dead," said the Spider, "and—"

"An' jist now comes dis letter from a gal, wrote to young Watson, and w'ich I seen fit to open, from which it seems dat de young cove has already found Avondale."

"What is that?" cried Paschal, frantically. "Let me see the letter."

"Heer 'tis."

Paschal seized the letter and, after perusing it, groaned:

"My God! I am ruined!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A SLIGHT CLEW.

For the next two weeks Burr busied himself in trying to run upon a clew to the whereabouts of Ned Paschal and his gang, but was unsuccessful.

He knew that the Central Office men were working upon the murder case and also that of the diamond robbery but had made no progress in either case.

In the first place, like himself, they had begun at the wrong end.

They still believed that Robert Avondale, and he alone, had committed the murder, and they still entertained the belief that that individual had lost his life in the burning wreck of the Central train.

Therefore they were not worrying much over that.

As to the diamond robbery, they had made quite as little progress, and had not even run upon a workable clew.

Meanwhile, Thad had never gone near the Central Office, and the superintendent was ignorant of the fact that he was working upon the case on his own hook.

At length the superintendent, in sheer desperation, sent for him.

"Thad," he began, "I'm in a hole, and I want you to help me out."

"Only too glad to, superintendent, if it is within my power."

"It is within your power."

"What is it?"

"You have heard of the Marboro murder case, of course."

"A little."

"The boys are unable to make anything out of it."

"I am not surprised at that."

"I know. It is the general belief that the murderer lost his life in that wreck, but even that lacks confirmation, and my boys have failed to unravel the mystery."

"Perhaps there is a good reason for that."

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you guess?"

"You think it possible that the fellow did not lose his life?"

"Everything is possible, you know, especially in a case of this kind."

"I know, but—come, old fellow," he said, quickly, noticing a strange twinkle in the detective's eye, "you know more about this affair than I do. How the deuce is it you always get hold of inside facts before any one else?"

"By keeping my eyes open, I suppose. But you are assuming a good deal when you infer that I know anything about this case."

"Come, now, old fellow, it is simply out of the question that you do not know something about this case. Come, now."

"Well, then, since you insist, I do know a little about it."

Thad then went on to describe his experiences in connection with the affair, and concluded with asking:

"Did it ever occur to your boys that this man Avondale may not have been the murderer?"

"Why, no; certainly not. There is a pretty clear case against him, isn't there?"

"No case at all; but, supposing there was, now that you believe him dead, what is the good of worrying any more about the affair?"

"Well, for one thing, I want to know whether he is dead or not. You have just expressed a doubt that he is dead. But why do you say there is no case against this man?"

Thad expressed what he had learned in this direction.

"But, you express a doubt as to the fellow being dead. What reason have you to doubt it?"

"One very good reason is the fact that I have seen him alive in the last three days."

"Seen him alive?"

"Yes."

"You astonish me."

"No more than I was astonished at the discovery."

Thad then related his thrilling experience chasing the fugitive.

"Well, this beats the Jews! To think that all this has been going on under our very noses and we know nothing about it. What has become of the fellow?"

"His wife has just received a telegram from him, so she says, and that he was on his way to California."

"Well, let him go. If your theory is correct, the poor fellow has suffered too much already, and it is our duty to trace the crime to the real criminal and exonerate the innocent man."

"That is my idea about it."

"But have you any theory as to who the right party is, Thad?"

"A vague one."

"Noted party?"

"Rather—Ned Paschal, the Spider."

"Holy smoke!"

"That is what I said when I heard it."

"But what motive could the Spider

have had in killing this man? You know he is noted for his caution."

"I only say there is sufficient ground for suspicion, in my opinion, to justify us in ferreting the matter."

"But you did not give your theory as to the possible motive."

Thad reflected.

"You remember there was a diamond robbery the same night?" he finally said.

"Yes."

"Have you made any headway in that case?"

"None to speak of; but what has that to do with the murder case?"

"Possibly nothing—possibly a good deal. Here is my theory. It may be wrong, but I give it to you for what it is worth."

"Well?"

"You know the rich widow, Mrs. Lonsdale, whose diamonds were stolen, is a next-door neighbor of Marboro, the man who was murdered."

"So I believe."

"You may not have known it, but Marboro was on remarkably friendly terms with the widow—so much so, indeed, that it was whispered about that a wedding might be expected at an early day."

"Indeed?"

"It is also a well-known fact that Marboro was a gambler—some say also a policy broker. Howbeit, he was a gambler with a somewhat shady record, which is not far from saying that he was a crook. Now, being a gambler, it is not difficult to imagine that he went broke some times."

"He would be an uncommonly lucky gambler if he did not."

"Well, considering all these circumstances, I make the deduction that, possibly he was implicated in the robbery; that entrance to her house was had from his—you know the police have been unable to discover how the robbers got into her house—and that the two men quarreled over the division of the spoils, and Paschal shot the other."

"Why might not Marboro have tried to prevent Paschal from taking the diamonds and the other shot him in consequence?"

"The trouble with that theory is the fact that Marboro was shot in his own house. If he had been defending the widow's property he would have been more likely to have been in her house."

"Unless, as you say, entrance was effected from his house."

"By jove! That is an idea!" exclaimed the detective, enthusiastically. "That is the better theory of the two. The burglars effected an entrance through the dividing wall of the two houses, secured the booty, returned to Marboro's house, and were there met by Marboro himself, when a fight ensued, resulting in the death of Marboro. That is the best theory I have struck yet. Superintendent, we must give way to you once in a while, after all."

"You know the old adage about two heads, etc.?"

"I do, indeed, and I have realized it more than once in your case."

"Well, what is your plan?"

"First, I shall go to the house and make an investigation. Possibly I may be able to run upon some clew there. If I do I shall go to work upon it at once."

"That is a good idea. And in the meantime keep a sharp lookout for the Spider and his gang."

"I shall do that."

It was late in the afternoon when the detective called at the residence of the late Frederick Marboro, which had been closed up ever since the day following the night of the murder.

He had procured the keys on an order from the superintendent, and, letting himself in at the street door, proceeded at once to the parlor where the murder had been committed.

His first move was to examine the partition wall between the two houses, and was not long in locating the sliding panel.

He next searched the Marboro house for a clew as to who the perpetrator of the crime might be.

Upon the floor he picked up a portion of a watch chain, which had been broken off.

CHAPTER XXVI. A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

Without putting much store by the bit of broken watch-chain as a clew, Thad put it into his pocket.

"It's an insignificant little thing, apparently, but smaller things than that have led to important discoveries before now."

And this was all he found.

Every room, up-stairs and down, was carefully gone over, but with the same result.

He then paid a visit to the widow next door.

The maid who had been chloroformed the night of the robbery could tell nothing.

She remembered of waking and finding something pressed upon her mouth and nostrils, and experienced a smothered sensation, but she had seen no one, and could not tell how the robbers had got into the house or what they were like.

It was long after nightfall when the detective left the house.

As he stepped out of the vestibule a wet, chilly blast blew into his face, and he pulled the collar of his coat up about his ears and dashed down the steps.

He was about to proceed upon his way, when he caught the sound of a gruff, muffled voice close by, although the speaker was concealed in the shadow so that he could not discern him.

"Dat's him, for sure," said the voice. "I'm dead sure on't."

"How d'yer know?" interrogated another voice, which was somewhat inclined to raspiness.

"'Cause I've seen him afore, an' I'd know him anywhur'."

Thad stole a hasty glance in the direction, but could only perceive the dim outlines of two figures crouching close to the area wall.

Not caring to discuss matters with them, whoever they might be, he pushed on, and had soon reached Sixth avenue.

The street is particularly dark and dreary just at this point.

Thad stopped on the corner to wait for a car, but had stood there but a minute, when he heard footsteps approaching from the direction he had come.

As the street was deserted, except for the newcomers and himself, he naturally turned to look.

As he did so, he caught sight of two skulking figures moving rapidly toward him, who, as soon as they perceived that they were seen, sprang quickly aside, so as to conceal themselves in the shadow of the tall buildings.

Convinced now that they were the same men whom he had heard talking, and that they were following him, Thad decided not to take the car, but to watch the movements of these individuals instead.

He, therefore, leisurely crossed Sixth avenue and strolled unconcernedly on toward Broadway.

It was not long before he discovered that the men were again shadowing him, but he effected not to notice the circumstance.

When Broadway was reached, Thad turned down that thoroughfare, until he came to where Seventh avenue crosses it almost in a line, and continued his journey on the latter street.

He knew the neighborhood all along this street to be extremely tough, and it was for that reason that he had chosen it, in order to give the shadowers a chance to show their hands.

The latter appeared to be in no hurry to overtake him, so he concluded they merely wished to discover where he belonged.

But Thad did not propose that they should have even this satisfaction.

So, after walking a block or two in this direction, he turned into a saloon.

It was not an over-respectable place, and he guessed it was about the kind of place that his shadowers would be likely to frequent.

He was not mistaken.

He had only just time to step up to the bar and order a cigar, when the two men slouched into the place.

Thad saw them without turning his head in their direction, and proceeded to study them in the mirror back of the bar.

One of them was an old man, with snowy hair and bushy beard of the same color. He was dressed in rough, but fairly good clothing, and had a somewhat jolly, though bibulous-looking face.

His companion, on the contrary, who was tall and lank, bore the stamp of the villain in every lineament of his countenance, which was unmistakably Irish.

He was also fairly well dressed, but wore his slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, apparently for the purpose of concealing as much as possible of his villainous countenance.

The two men slouched up to the bar, the elder man contriving to get alongside of the detective.

After ordering, the old man turned and affected to just notice Thad for the first time.

"Wet night, stranger," he said. "Dunno w'en I've seen dirtier weather."

"Rather disagreeable," admitted the detective.

"Not a very good night to be out."

"That depends upon what one's business is," rejoined Thad.

"Wal, for honest folk, I mean," said the other, with an attempt at gravity.

"Oh, as for honest folk, they will remain at home in bed. It is only us rogues that go abroad such a night as this."

At this the old man chuckled merrily, and then said:

"I see you're a good feller. You are one on us. See? Which way was yer goin', cap'n?"

"Oh, just taking a stroll," replied the detective.

"Yer don't happen ter live down dis way, den?"

"Oh, no; I live in Harlem."

There was a slight expression of disappointment on the old man's face, and he gave his companion a meaning glance.

"Anyway, yer don't mind walkin' a leetle furder down, I don't reckon?"

"Oh, no. Anything for sociability."

"Wal, let's go down to de Elite Club, on Thirty-third."

"Any sport there?"

"Dead loads on't."

"That's the place for me, then."

Burr could not imagine what their game was, but he imagined the men must in some way be mixed up with either the murder or the diamond robbery, and he determined to find out what he could about them, even at the risk of his own safety.

The men left the saloon and walked on down Seventh avenue to Thirty-third street, and then turned toward Eighth avenue.

About the middle of the block, the old man, who was in the lead, turned into a cigar store.

It was an extremely small place, and presided over by a fat woman whose size was out of all proportion to the dimensions of the shop.

Thad and the other man followed, and when the three were inside the place was about full.

"W'y, hullo, Patriarch!" cried the fat woman, addressing the old man. "Hully gee! I ain't seen youse since de blast went off in me gran'mudder's cellar. How yer whiskers has growed since I seen yer las'. How are ye ketchin' 'em, papa?"

"Oh, fair to middlin'. Whose in de back, Mollie?"

"Nobody but de gang, Patriarch," replied the woman, in a thick, wheezy voice. And then in a confidential tone, only intended for the old man's ears:

"Whose de jay wid yer?"

"Oh, dat's no jay, Mollie," whispered the old chap, with a knowing wink. "Dat's a fly detective w'ot's smellin' de Lonsdale diamond case."

"Hully gee! W'ot d'ye wanter bring a beak in liar for, Patriarch?"

"Sh—sh—sh!" admonished the latter. "We're goin' ter rost 'im. Mum's de word. We're goin' ter do 'im."

"Oh, dat's de lay, is it?"

"Dat's de game!"

Just then a tough-looking individual pushed his way into the shop, pushed up to the counter and bought a cigar, and while he was lighting it, whispered to Thad:

"Don't go in with them! They intend to kill you!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PLOT.

Thad was a trifle upset by the warning.

He had already realized that he was running a great risk in going with these ruffians, but he had never in his life hesitated to go anywhere where duty called him, and on the present occasion the idea of fear had never entered his head.

But now that this stranger, who looked as if he might belong either to this or a similar gang of thugs, had given him the warning, he experienced a momentary sense of apprehension.

It passed as quickly as it came, however, and, after looking the stranger over minutely for a second, whispered:

"I must. Business demands it!"

"You're foolish," whispered the stranger. "But if you must go, then I shall go too. They will find it more difficult to get away with two than one."

By this time the Patriarch had finished his confab with the fat woman, and, turning to Thad and the Irishman—who, by the way, had not opened his mouth since Thad had met him, and who he had conceived was a deaf mute—said:

"Wal, gents, let's 'tire to de private parlor, whur we kin have a small bottle all by ourselves. See?"

With that he pushed aside the portieres that hung over the door communicating with the back room and was about to pass through when he cast a glance back at his companions, who had fallen into line preparatory to following, and, seeing that the stranger was also preparing to follow, he stopped.

"No, yer don't!" he observed, gruffly. "Dis is a quiet party o' friends, and no strangers allowed. See?"

"This is a friend of mine," interposed Thad, "and it is my desire that he go with us."

"Wal, he can't go, dat's all," growled the old man. "No strangers allowed."

"That is all right. If he does not go, then I shall not. Good night, Patriarch."

And, turning upon his heel, was about to leave the place.

The old man hastened after him and, overtaking him as he was passing through a gambling room, said:

"Say, cap'n, w'ot's de use o' gittin' mad? Come back, and we'll have a good time."

"Not unless my friend is also allowed to accompany me."

"But don't yer see," whispered the old man, coming close and growing confidential, "he's not de sort. Say, he's no friend o' your'n. I c'u'd see dat at a glance. D'y'e know w'ot dat cove is?"

"I know he is my friend."

"No, he's not. I'll tell yer w'ot he is. He's a smeller, an' if yer stick ter him yer'll wear bracelets w'ot yer can't take off widout a key, and anudder man'll carry de key."

"No, you're mistaken—I'm sure you are. That fellow is an old chum of mine whom I have known for years. No, I won't go in without him."

"W'ot's de matter? 'Fraid? Dat's it, I reckon. Hully gee! I'd be ashamed to be affeered to go anywhere."

"Yes, that is it. I'm afraid of you chaps. I'm afraid you are a branch of the detective department and you only want to get me inside and pinch me for that job I did the other night."

The Patriarch looked at him curiously and with a perplexed expression.

"Come, now, me duck, don't yer try ter gimme any o' dat guff! Youse ain't any o' dat kind, see?"

"Am I not? Then why do you want me to go with you? I'll stake my life that you are that kind, and you can have no use for an honest man in that den of yours."

The old man was stumped for an an-

swer for an instant, but he soon recovered his self-possession and, laughing merrily, said:

"Oh, wal, I don't jes' say ye're clean honest, or anyting like dat, but I don't t'ink ye're a out-and-outer. See? And we wan'ter nishyate yer."

"Thanks; I don't believe I care to be initiated to-night. Some other time. Good night, old frosty," and Thad moved away.

As he did so he overheard the old man mutter:

"Never mind, me buster, I'll be wid yer later."

The stranger who had given Thad the warning walked up and overtook him before he had gone far.

When he turned and perceived who it was the detective smiled and extended his hand.

"I have no idea who you are, sir, but you did me a good turn to-night, and I thank you for it."

"Don't mention it. I had a twofold purpose in wishing to prevent you from going in there. In the first place, I knew it was the design to murder you, and in the second place, I desire to put you on to some facts which will materially aid you in your work."

Thad wondered more than ever.

Who could this fellow be, who used the language of a gentleman and looked like a ruffian?

At length he asked:

"Who are you that you should take this interest in me?"

"That you shall know later, sir. Suffice it that I know you, and also know your danger at the hands of those villains."

"How did you learn this?"

"By mingling with them and hearing their conversation."

"Then you are a detective?"

"Yes, and no."

"I do not understand you."

"Well, then, I am not a detective in the proper sense of the word—like yourself, for instance—but I am one in the sense that I have undertaken, on my own account, to ferret out a certain mystery in which you yourself are interested."

"How did you discover that I was a detective, and that I was interested in any mystery?"

"That you shall also know at the proper time. I know and desire to give you whatever aid there is in my power."

"It is very kind of you, I assure you."

"Don't mention it. What I am doing is as much to my interest as it is to yours—more, indeed, for I have a selfish interest in the affair, while you have nothing to gain beyond the paltry reward offered."

Thad was sorely puzzled; he would have given a great deal to have known who the stranger was, but contented himself with asking:

"As you appear to be pretty well acquainted with matters in general, perhaps you won't mind telling me who those people whom we have just left are? I know they are crooks, but what particular ones I do not know."

"I am surprised—and you a detective? The fact that they shadowed you from Mrs. Lonsdale's house, I should think, would have led you to suspect who they were."

"As I say, I knew they were crooks, and felt quite sure that they were a part of the gang who had committed the robbery, and, possibly, also the murder of Marboro."

"So you have already surmised that the same gang committed both the robbery and the murder?"

"Undoubtedly. There was no other conclusion to be arrived at."

"There you have struck the correct deduction. But as I have not told you who these fellows are, I will now do so. You have heard of Ned Paschal—known among his pals and to the police as the Spider?"

"Yes. Great Scott! Is that—"

"A part of his gang, and about the worst part of it. The old chap whom they call the Patriarch is the Spider's lieutenant, and one of the keenest and most un-

scrupulous rogues the world over produced."

"Yes, now that you recall him, I remember him, but if my memory serves me he formerly went by another soubriquet."

"Yes. Tiger was his former title, but, as that name became too familiar to the police, he concluded to change it, and, as he had become very gray by the time he finished his last term, when he came out his pals called him the Patriarch—a name of which he is extremely vain."

"You appear to be remarkably familiar with the history of these people. May I ask?"

"Yes," interposed the other, coolly, "I was one of them once."

"But did not relish the life, I suppose, and left them?"

"That was it. But that I will explain with the rest, later. Your object for going into that place was to discover who these fellows were, and what connection if any, they had with the robbery and murder, I presume?"

"That was it."

"Well, you have learned all that without endangering your life by going in."

"Yes, thanks to you, I have."

"Provided I have told you nothing but the truth? Now, if you will be good enough to come up into my room—I live up here—I shall take pleasure in proving what I have said."

They had walked as they talked, and had arrived in front of an apartment house on Thirty-eighth street, near Eighth avenue.

Thad hesitated about going up.

Might not this fellow be one of the gang?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNEXPECTED DISCOVERIES.

As we have seen, it was with a good deal of trepidation that Thad received the invitation of his new acquaintance to visit his lodging.

The fellow's talk had impressed the detective favorably, for the most part, but his appearance was decidedly against him.

To begin with, his eyes were squint, a characteristic which Thad detested above all things.

He could not conceive of a frank, manly person possessing squint eyes.

The fellow also wore a frowsy red beard and long, unkempt hair of the same color.

This was another point against him in the detective's eyes. He did not like red hair.

A man might possibly go through life with squint eyes and never commit murder, but with the additional deformity, as he considered it, of red hair, he could not hope to be anything but a pickpocket.

The fellow also had the unpleasant habit of looking at your feet and twisting his hands in a nervous fashion while talking.

This had the effect of causing Thad extreme nervousness, and a desire to kick the person.

It is, therefore, a matter of no surprise that he hesitated about going to a room in a gloomy apartment house, at night, with him.

But the fellow pleaded, and his voice was manly and kindly; besides, there certainly would not be the danger in going with him, treacherous though he might be, that there would have been in going into the den of the Paschal gang.

Unless, indeed—and the reflection gave him a shiver in spite of his habitual indifference to danger—unless this was only a bait to lead him into a nest of these bloodthirsty wretches.

Nevertheless, after a little reflection, he decided to take his chances of life or death, as he had done thousands of times before, and followed the stranger into the vestibule of the house.

The stranger opened the door with a pass-key, and the two ascended several flights of stairs, and finally entered a single small room, into which the fellow let himself with another key.

The room was in total darkness, but

the man soon struck a match and lighted a gas jet which protruded from the wall on one side of the room.

Thad then saw that the room was plainly but comfortably furnished, such as a fairly well-to-do bachelor might have.

"Not very big or very luxurious," commented the host, in a cheerful tone, "but good enough for a makeshift for a poor devil. Later on I shall have better, if things pan out as I expect."

Thad was surprised and relieved to note that the objectionable squint had suddenly vanished, and when the fellow looked at him when he spoke, it was with a pair of large, wide-open, and as fine eyes as he had ever beheld.

He guessed now that his host had been assuming this freak for the purpose of disguise, but this was nothing to the surprise that was still in store for him.

As his host ceased speaking, he turned to a dresser at one end of the room and busied himself for a few minutes about his face.

When he turned and faced the detective again he was a different man.

In short, he was none other than Tommy Watkins.

"Great Caesar!" exclaimed Thad. "Who would have thought it?"

"And you didn't know me?"

"Never suspected you," replied Thad, a trifle embarrassed at being so neatly imposed upon.

"And you the great detective you are? I couldn't have imagined it possible."

"It is, indeed, rarely that I am deceived. But there were several things in your favor. In the first place, your disguise was most complete and ingenious, and in the second, I had no occasion to suspect that you were other than you appeared to be, and certainly not the person you really are."

"Why not the latter?"

"Because, from the telegram received by Mrs. Avondale, I supposed you were on the Pacific coast by this time."

"You saw that, then?"

"She told me about it."

"That was a good one!"

"It was a hoax, then?"

"Partly."

"But not entirely?"

"No."

"What do you mean?"

"That I will have to leave with the other explanations."

"You do not trust me, then?"

"Implicitly; but I am obliged to keep certain matters secret for a day or two."

"I am to infer, however, that Avondale has gone West?"

"Yes, that much I will tell you. He has gone West."

Thad questioned no further in this direction, but he drew his own inference that, although the accused man had gone West, he had not gone as far as Tommy would like to have him believe he had gone.

A brief silence ensued, and then Tommy suddenly broke out with:

"I am very sorry, Mr. Burr, that I shot your horse that day; but it was my only alternative. It was either that or you would beat my game, and I could not stand that. Besides, it was better to shoot the critter, I thought, than to shoot you. Don't you think so yourself?"

"Well, yes," smiled Thad, grimly. "Now show me the proofs of what you told me as we came along."

Tommy hesitated, and colored.

"Well, the first proof I have shown you in revealing my own identity."

"Yes."

"The next is by showing you this," he went on, taking out a paper, unfolding it and handing it to the detective. "That proves my former membership in the ancient and honorable order of rascals of which Ned Paschal is the high mucky-muck."

"Why, you were not a member very long," exclaimed Thad, examining the document. "The date of this is scarcely two weeks old."

"That's right. Two days was long enough for me. You see, I'm one of those fellows that know when they have enough."

"Joined it out of curiosity?" queried the detective, still perusing the document.

"No; because I had to for a special purpose."

Tommy refrained from going into details on this point, and, having no suspicion of the truth, Thad did not question him further.

"Well, I must say, this is a queer document," at length commented Thad, folding the paper and handing it back.

"And it proves that what I said about Ned Paschal was true."

"Entirely. Is that all you have to prove?"

"All for the present. I am going to make some more statements, but the proof of them will have to be sought out and established by you and me later on."

"What are they?"

"One is what I told you when we were out yonder in the country, that Robert Avondale is innocent of the murder."

"I know that."

"The other is that Ned Paschal is guilty of the murder, and he and his gang of the diamond robbery."

"As I suspected. But how do you know this?"

Tommy pointed at his certificate of membership in the order of thugs by way of an answer.

"Then you saw it?"

"I did not say so."

"But how are we to prove this?"

"By hard work."

"Then we shall do it. Here is my hand."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SECRET COMPACT.

After a brief silence, Thad asked: "You know the resort of this man and his gang, don't you?"

"Very well."

"We may as well go there and make a raid at once, then."

"I do not believe it would be policy, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because if they are arrested now it will be next to impossible to secure evidence against them."

"I do not see why not now as well as later on."

"As I said before, we must seek the evidence, and I may as well tell you that there is another person seeking evidence also."

"Our plan, then, will be to go among them and pick up our evidence at first hand," suggested Thad.

"That is my idea. Disguise ourselves and go among them. You see, I have all the signs and passwords, and we will have no trouble in securing admission to their secret councils."

"But who is this other person who you say is securing evidence?"

"That is a secret which I dare not tell even you, sir."

At Tommy's suggestion the two men disguised themselves, although Thad had to go home to secure his disguise. But the distance was not very great and he was soon back and ready for business.

Thad was made up as an old man and Tommy as a young one, both farmers and extremely verdant.

"This ought to be bait enough for them," observed the detective. "Can you talk hayseed dialect?"

"I shu'd rayther say I could, by cracky!"

About midnight they left Tommy's lodgings and went directly to the flat house in which the robbers' den was located.

Thad noticed that the building was occupied by the vilest class of people—just the place for a robbers' den, as the class occupying the lower part of the house were not likely to trouble themselves about what those on the top floor did.

As the street door was unlocked, Tommy simply pushed it open and went in, and Thad followed him.

On reaching the flat Tommy knocked boldly at the door, and it was promptly opened by the Patriarch.

"I'm afeerd it's a bit late, neighbor," began the detective, "but I'm lookin' for

my boy Tommy, an' I heered tell that he was here."

The Patriarch eyed him critically and a trifle suspiciously, and finally responded:

"No, yer boy's not har, if yer means Tommy Watson. See?"

"Tommy Watson! Thet's him!" ejaculated the pretended farmer. "Air yer sartin, mister, that Tommy hain't heer?"

"Dead sure," growled the Patriarch.

"Wal, I swaur. That jist beats Sam Hill! Den you know he writ that he was aworkin' for a party named—con-sarn if I kin think on't neaw, but I know he lived in this beause, an' he said—my boy Tommy did, as heaw theer was an old gent—a mighty nice old gent—named the Patriarch."

"Say, dis gent is jes' mos' too good an' kind ter live! He orter be wearin' a halo now, see?"

"Oh, you know the gentleman, then?"

"I reckon I do—a little bit," grunted the Patriarch, with a supercilious shrug, "me'n him yooster play craps togedder w'en we wasn't more'n dat high," pursued the old man, indicating the height of the imaginary youths by placing his hand in the vicinity of his knees."

"Do tell! Wal, neaw, I do reckon ye be right well acquainted. Be yeau neighbors neaw?"

"Lord bless yer heart, no! I wisht we was, but de pore ole gent's laid away wid his fadders in de cold, cold ground. See?"

"I want to know! Thet's too bad. Whut 'peered to be the ailment o' the old gentleman?"

"I dunno, hardly. A kinder of a general failin' and wastin' away of de procrastynashun, I t'ink, togedder wid a compilation o' de longevity, dat caused de hypothesis ter fulminate."

"Gracious goodness!" exclaimed the so-called farmer, with well-feigned astonishment. "Why didn't the dod-gasted doctors give him Smiley's Compound, an' bleed him? Thet's what Doctor Chugwater down our way'd a done. But my boy Tommy was har, wasn't he, mister?"

"Nope, never heerd tell o' no sich bloke. See? Whut did he say he was ado'in' for de gent w'ot lives har?"

"I dunno's he said whut he was ado'in'. I recollect now that the gentleman that he worked fer was named P'askill, or sumthin' like that. Do yeau know any person o' that name 'beaut heer?"

"Nope."

"Wal, I s'pose we mout's well go, then, Jimmy. Good-by mister."

"Good day, old early rose," chuckled the Patriarch. "Say," he went on, addressing his pals after closing the door, "dere's a presshus pair o' hayseeds. I'm feared dey'll git lost in this nayborhood."

"I hoy didn't yez call them insode an' let us fale their pulse?" asked Red Regan. "The chances is they had a wad the bigness av the laig av yez."

"It's roight yez air, me b'y," put in Black Mike. "We moight 'a' made the proice o' the grog around, anyway."

"Hayseeds, my eye!" growled the Spider, with a sneer. "I'm sure, now, that you have taken leave of your senses, Patriarch."

"W'ot's de matter wid youse, Spider?" muttered the old man. "Did yer t'ink I didn't tumble ter who dey was?"

"No, I'm blessed if I believe you did," laughed Paschal.

"Dat's w're yer lose sight o' me pow'ers o' penytrashun, Spider. I knowed dey was smellers de minute I clapped eyes onto 'em. T'ink dey kin fool dis old hawksh? Comin' round har made up as hayseeds askin' fer deir boy Tommy! Dat's a good un' fer a jay detective."

But even if they had seen through Thad's disguise—and it would be a clever disguise that the old hawk would not penetrate—Thad had seen more than they imagined, and taken several mental notes which were to be used in the future.

And the strangest thing about it all was that, although the old man had seen through Thad's disguise, he apparently had not done as much in the case of Watson, otherwise he would not have spoken of him as being a detective, and

would have recognized him in his true person.

While the Spider affected to treat this visit with indifference, it was not very difficult to discern that he had been rendered exceedingly nervous and apprehensive over it.

So much so that Thad and his companion were scarcely out of the building when the Spider called Claw to him and said:

"Claw, follow those fellows and see where they go."

"Yep," replied the wizened little creature. "Is dat all?"

"Learn all you can about them," added Paschal.

"Yep. Is dat all?"

"Yes. Hurry, or they'll be out of your way."

"Yep."

"Stay!" as the fellow was passing through the door.

"Yep."

"Don't get caught."

"Nope."

And away he dashed.

Thad and Tommy had reached Eighth avenue and were walking along discussing their future plans, when Thad's keen eye caught sight of an insignificant little creature dogging his steps, and so close upon his heels that he must have caught every word of their conversation.

Thinking that he was some mischievous or inquisitive boy, the detective turned upon him and was about to order him to go about his business, when Tommy caught sight of him and, recognizing, forgot his own incognito and called out:

"Hullo, Claw, doing the sneak act for the old man?"

The little fellow made no reply and scampered away. He did not, however, lose sight of the two men until they reached their destination.

CHAPTER XXX.

A BRIGHT PUPIL.

When Claw returned to the den the Spider was anxiously waiting for him, and evinced unusual interest in him when he came in.

"Well, my boy," he began, as soon as Claw put his head in at the door, "what luck?"

"Furty good."

"What did you learn?"

"Where dey lives, for one ting."

"Well, where is that?"

"In T'irty-sevent' street, clost ter Ate avenoo. See?"

"And they are detectives, are they?"

"One on 'em is."

"The old one, eh?"

"Yep."

"Who is the other one?"

"Who d'ye s'pose t'udder one was? Youse dat's dead slick on tumblin' ter people's rackets."

"Who was it, Claw?"

"W'ot d'ye say to Tommy Watson, de cove w'ot we 'nhyated t'udder night?"

"What?" gasped the Spider, springing from his chair. "The deuce you say!"

"Yer don't mean ter tell us?" growled the Patriarch. "It couldn't 'a' been—"

"Ol t'ought yez niver got fooled, Patriarch?" sneered Red Regan.

"There yez air roight, me b'ye," echoed Black Mike. "It's himself that niver gits desaved, accordin' to his own blather, bad look to 'im!"

"Will yer hold yer clack, youse fellers, afore I t'ump de two of yer?" shouted the Patriarch, indignantly. "How was it, Claw?"

"Wal, yer see, I was a-ramblin' long at dere heels like a pug arter a dude, w'en 'is w'iskers, de old bloke w'ot looked like a jay, twigged me, an' turns onter me like as if he was a-goin' ter do me dare and den. See? And den de udder bloke squints round and drops his goggles onto me portrait, he does, an' quick like, as if he was all broke up wid excitement, says:

"'Hully gee!' he says, 'is dat youse, Claw?' he says, an' 'course I tumbled to de squeak on 'im an' know'd it was Tommy. See?'"

"W'ot'd yer say t'im?" questioned the Patriarch, eagerly.

"Nuttin'."

"Didn't let on dat yer knowed 'im?"

"Nope. I jes' shinned off till dey was past an' dey t'ought I was gone, an' den I done me purty sneak an' foller'd dem to de domicile w'ere dey hangs out."

"Did you hear what they were talking about, Claw?" interjected Spider.

"Yep—some."

"What were they saying?"

"Not much dat I twigged, 'cept sumpin' bout raidin' dis den, now dat dey're onto it."

"This was from the old man, I suppose?" said Spider.

"Yep."

"And Tommy coincided, of course?"

"Nope. Didn't heider on 'em go inside jes' den."

"I mean that the young fellow agreed with the old one that they ought to raid this place."

"Nope. He t'ought it was better ter wait till dey got more proof."

"By which time," laughed the Spider, "they will find a deserted ship. Claw, you're a trump! I shall have to increase your pay."

"Claw," cried the Patriarch, "ye're not only a trump—ye're an aee full! Ye're de bright partick'lar red spot w'ot completes de heart flush o' me existence. Come to me arms, me huckleberry!"

And the old man was so elated that he embraced the little fellow.

"This is a most important discovery for us," observed the Spider, reflectively; "and we must lose no time in taking advantage of it."

"W'ot's de lay, Spider?" questioned the Patriarch.

"Move. The sooner the better."

"W'ere?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter. Anywhere, so as to be away from here."

"I know de place, den."

"Where?"

"In de buildin' wid de Elite Club. Yer know where dat is?"

"Yes, I know where it is. Is there any room there?"

"Yep. De third floor's ter let."

"All right, Patriarch. You attend to it first thing in the morning."

"So I will, Spider. But don't yer t'ink we'd better move ter-night?"

There was a look of apprehension in the old man's face which frightened the robber leader.

He knew from long experience that that peculiar expression meant volumes.

He knew that the Patriarch was not easily moved, and that when he did show signs of alarm there was something serious to be anticipated.

"Why, what is it, Patriarch?" gasped the Spider, breathlessly.

"Oh, nuttin' much," replied the old man, with a significant shrug.

"But I know there is. You never look like that unless there is something in the wind."

"Didn't I say dat we'd better move ter-night?"

"I know you did, but—"

"Wal, de old man ain't in de habit o' jokin' w'en dere's blood on de moon."

"That is what I am aware of," muttered Spider, beginning to tremble violently; "and that is why I am so anxious to know what is to be feared."

The old man reflected a moment, and then growled:

"Do we move ter-night?"

"Certainly, Patriarch, if you suggest it," returned the Spider, with a tremor in his tone. "But what—"

"Yer'll not be satisfied till I tell yer w'ot's a-brewin', will yer?"

"I should very much like to know."

"Wal, I s'pose I'll hafter tell yer."

"Please do! That is a good old friend," cried Paschal, eagerly.

"Wal, yer know de hayseed w'ot was up hiar ter-night?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Yer t'ought I didn't smoke 'im?"

"I know now that you did."

"Dat he was a detective."

"Yes; I knew you said he was a detective."

"But I didn't say w'ot one."

"No; you didn't. Who was he?"

The old man gave the Spider a look that made him turn pale, and then said in a low, impressive tone:

"Thad Burr."

"What?"

Paschal sprang to his feet and clutched the old man's arm convulsively.

"Dat's who it was," said the Patriarch, calmly.

"Then let us lose no time in vacating! With that man on our track there is little hope of escape. Do you imagine he suspects me of being guilty of the killing of Marboro?"

"Yep."

"Great Heaven!"

"Not only suspects, but he's got a purty good clew to it."

This, it may be guessed, was largely speculative on the Patriarch's part.

As a matter of fact, he knew nothing about how much Thad had learned, and only suspected that he had run upon a clew from seeing him enter, alternately, the houses of Marboro and Mrs. Lonsdale, but there was nothing that brought such joy to the old miscreant's heart as terrifying Paschal with imaginary dangers.

"This is terrible!" whined the now thoroughly terrified wretch. "Are you sure that you are making no mistake, Patriarch?"

"Is de old man in de habit o' makin' mistakes?"

"No; but how did you learn this? How did you find out that this was Thad Burr, the great detective?"

"Wal, I found out w'ot he know'd by seein' him comin' outen Marboro's house, an' den follerin' 'im, makin' his 'quaintance, an' pumpin' de fac's outen 'im. It was dat way dat I discovered who he was, too."

"You're a jewel, Patriarch!" exclaimed the Spider, grasping his hand. "Only for you I should have been ruined long ago. Let us move at once."

"An' we ain't got none too much time. It only wants a hour o' daylight."

"That will be sufficient, if every one does his duty. Now to work, boys, with a will. You had better go on over and make arrangements with old Mollie, Patriarch. And you, Claw, get some trucks."

And thus the decampment began.

CHAPTER XXXI

DISAPPOINTED.

"Who is that queer-looking creature?" asked Thad, as Claw sped away and became lost in the shadow.

"That is one of the Spider's henchmen," rejoined Tommy; "and a keen fellow he is, too."

"He was evidently sent to spy upon us. It was fortunate that we discovered him in time, and that you knew who he was."

"It was lucky that we discovered him, no doubt; but it is not so certain about it being a good thing that I recognized him."

"How is that?"

"It would have been all right if I had kept my mouth shut, but as it was, I'm afraid he also recognized me."

"Do you, indeed?"

"I am almost sure of it, from the look he gave me."

"Still, what harm will that do?"

"They will know, at least, that I am in the city, and will be on the lookout for me."

"Even so; it is not likely that they will recognize you again, if you go about in disguise, and—"

"Keep my mouth shut."

"That is it. Well, here we are at your lodgings again."

"Yes, here we are. I hope that that little imp hasn't followed us, after all."

"I hardly imagine he has, after the scare we gave him."

"I am not so sure about that. I cannot imagine that fellow returning, after being sent out on a mission, without fulfilling it. Ten to one he has followed us, but with more caution, this time."

"Well, to prevent any possible chance

of their interfering with our plans, let us go inside, remain for a moment, and then go to my house. It is not far from here. There we can arrange our plans in perfect security and without fear of molestation from these people."

Accordingly the two men entered the hall, which was in darkness, remained long enough to discourage any possible shadower who might be awaiting their reappearance, and then emerged once more.

It was but a brief walk from there to Thad's home in Thirty-fourth street, and they were not long in reaching it.

Once in the detective's private room, or "studio," as he delighted to call it, the two men arranged their plans for the future.

The first thing to be done was to devise a new disguise—one which even the lynx eye of the old Patriarch would not penetrate, and then, on the following night, to get into the den of the robbers by some hook or crook with a view to securing whatever evidence it was possible against the notorious Spider and his gang.

It was nearly daylight by the time they had matured their plans, and Thad persuaded Tommy to remain where he was instead of returning to his room, as, he argued, the rascals would very likely be on the alert for him.

After dividing the day between sleeping and talking over and elaborating their plot, some time before midnight they started out and proceeded directly to the flat in Thirty-third street, formerly occupied by the crooks.

Thad was made up as a natty old gentleman and Tommy as a young swell.

The street door of the house was ajar, as usual, and they climbed the three pairs of dingy stairs to the fourth floor and knocked at the well-known door of the flat.

But, as may be supposed, there was no response.

"They must have been out late last night, and have gone to bed early tonight," commented Thad, as he repeated the knock.

"More likely that they are out upon some expedition."

Still there was no response, and the detective repeated his knock a number of times.

But all to no purpose.

"I guess your theory is correct. They are all out. I wonder if there is any way we can get in?"

"I think I might effect an entrance from the fire-escape," suggested Tommy. "But what good would that do us?"

"Get inside and conceal ourselves, and overhear their conversation when they come in."

"Just the thing! There are plenty of places to hide. Wait here, and I'll go round to the fire-escape and climb in and open the door for you."

"That will not be necessary, as I have a key which I think will open it."

Thad put the key into the door, and the next instant they entered the den.

"We were more than correct in thinking that nobody was here," he observed, swinging the door wide open. "Look here."

And he swept his arm about the room, which the detective, a moment later, saw was naked of furniture.

This he could discern even in the dim twilight, but, not satisfied with this evidence, he struck a match and lighted the gas.

Every vestige of furniture was gone, and all that was left to testify that the place had ever been inhabited were a lot of loose papers and other debris scattered over the floor.

The two men regarded each other with expressions of consternation.

"They've made a clean sweep of it, and no mistake," remarked the detective. "I see through it all now. That little rogue's discovery gave them a scare, and they have decamped in time. I wonder if we can find anything among these papers to indicate which way they have gone."

With that he stooped and commenced

examining the loose sheets on the floor. In this task he was joined by Tommy, but they found it a tedious task, and after half an hour of it both abandoned it with mutual accord.

"There is nothing to be found here," said Thad, dejectedly. "I wonder if there is anything in any of these other rooms."

"There might be."

One by one the other rooms were gone over, but with no better results.

Thad was about to return to the first room, with a view to leaving the flat for good, when Tommy called his attention to something he had found while rummaging an old chest of drawers which had been left behind.

"Look!" called the young man. "I wonder if this is not the case that—"

But Thad had caught sight of it, rushed over and snatched it out of his hands.

It was a jewel-case of remarkably fine workmanship and costly material.

Thad hastily threw up the lid, and gasped with mingled surprise and delight at what he saw.

On the satin-lined lid was embossed in gold letters the name

"JEAN SEDGWICK LONSDALE."

"By Jove! this is a valuable 'find,'" cried the delighted detective. "So our hunt has not been entirely fruitless, after all."

"Yes. I remember that that is the case that Paschal had in his hand when he came back through the panel—"

Tommy stopped suddenly and colored violently.

"What is that?" demanded the detective.

"Nothing—that is," faltered the young man.

"Then, this is another part of the secret you were keeping from me, is it?"

"Yes—that is—no—er—"

"You may as well come out with it at once," the detective interrupted again. "Then I was not mistaken in my theory, based upon the hints dropped by you, that you were a witness to the robbery?"

Tommy hesitated, grew red and palid by turns, and at length stammeringly confessed:

"Ye—yes, sir, I—I—saw it all. I intended to tell you, but thought it would be better to wait until—"

"You may as well tell me the whole story now as at any other time. Did you witness the murder of Fred Marboro?"

The young man's knees smote together now, and he stared helplessly, beseechingly, pitifully, into the detective's face.

His lips moved, but he appeared powerless to speak.

"Tell me the truth. It will be better for you. I am confident you had no hand in it, and, although a witness—an unwilling one no doubt—you are innocent of any complicity in the crime."

"No, no! I am not innocent. I witnessed the murder. I was a volunteer witness, and I am an accomplice!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

HARD PUSHED.

The Spider was hard pushed.

He felt fairly confident that his moving would throw the detective off the track, but he wanted to be doubly sure of it.

For this reason he deployed his scouts in every direction with instructions to thwart the detective's plans in any way or manner that came handiest.

Thad expected something of this kind, and was accordingly on his guard.

Nevertheless, he had his own spies and friends, some of whom he did not know, men who knew him by reputation and admired him for his genius.

These men were in the habit of coming to him on the most unexpected occasions and giving him valuable tips.

It was a matter of no surprise, therefore, just as he was leaving the apartment house whence the thieves had flown, to be accosted by a fairly respectable-looking man, who asked to have a word with him.

Excusing himself from Tommy, Thad stepped aside with the stranger, and as soon as they were alone, the latter said:

"You will pardon what will seem to you an impertinence, but your name is Thaddeus Burr, is it not?"

Thad looked at the man, whose face was revealed by the light of a neighboring lamp, and, as it appeared to be honest, he answered:

"Well, what do you want?"

"You haven't answered my question," said the other, somewhat impatiently. "Before we can talk I must know whom I am talking to."

"I might say the same thing. To whom am I talking, sir?"

"I beg a thousand pardons," cried the other, growling fidgety, fumbling in his pocket and at last bringing out a card. "Carson, sir. You see the name there, sir. Chester Carson."

As he spoke he handed the card to the detective.

"I see this card," said Thad. "Well, Mr. Carson, my name is Burr. What can I do for you?"

"You are a detective, I believe?"

"I sometimes follow that calling."

"And at present working on the case of Frederick Marboro?"

"I don't know, sir, that—"

"Never mind," interrupted the stranger. "I know you are. There is no use of either denying or confessing it for the purpose for which I have in hand. You will pardon the impertinence, but I have a clew which I consider valuable in this case."

Thad regarded the man again for some moments, and then asked, somewhat carelessly:

"What is it?"

"You have just been up-stairs looking for the Spider and his gang, I see?"

"Well?"

"And you didn't find them?"

"I am sorry to say that I did not."

"Which was very natural, inasmuch as they have moved."

"All of which I discovered."

"Ah, yes," said the man, triumphantly, "but you didn't discover where they had moved to."

"No."

"And I know."

"Indeed?"

"I do."

"And you have come to me to impart the information?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"Well, you see," here he grew very confidential. "Paschal is a—that is, he used to be—a friend of mine—mine no more—and if he should by any means discover that I had betrayed him, it would in all probability be the death of me."

"Then, as I take it, you want money for this revelation?"

"Not a cent, sir, not a cent. You wrong me in thinking such a thing."

"In that case, there is nothing more to be said than for you to come out with the exposure. Mind, I have not asked this thing, and if you expose your ex-friend, you do so of your own free will."

"I know, I know. But what I want to come at is this. If I give you the facts and Paschal is not captured, you will not give me away to anybody who would carry the word to Paschal."

"You can trust me for that."

"Now, that is very satisfactory. But there is one thing more. You won't ask me to go on the witness stand and testify against him?"

"You have my word for that."

"Very good. Now, as a matter of fact, I do not know where all of the gang is to be found, but I do know where Paschal is, and he can be taken there as easy as a wink."

"That is quite sufficient, sir. If I succeed in capturing him, I will look out for the rest of the gang."

"Very well. He is stopping at—no matter—do you know the man when you see him?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps not, when disguised."

"Oh, that would depend upon how well he was disguised."

"Then we will take the chances. You know where the Hotel Metropole is?"

"Certainly."

"The saloon is closed up—apparently by this time, but there is a private poker room, for gentlemen of the first blood. He is there. I will go on ahead, make my entrance—all know me, you understand; then you come on, ask for me, and you will be admitted. Once inside, if his joblots happens to be disguised, I'll point him out to you. Is it a go?"

Thad reflected a moment.

He could not help thinking the fellow was either trying to put up a job on him or was some crank who imagined he knew something which he did not.

At the same time, it would not do to lose even a vague chance of capturing the bar lit chief.

The Metropole would not be far out of his way in going home, so, upon the whole, there would be nothing lost in trying the experiment.

"Yes," he at length answered. "I will go. Proceed, and I will follow."

Without another word the fellow put off, and Thad rejoined Tommy.

"Who is the cove?" inquired the young man.

"I have his card here," replied Thad, handing the bit of pasteboard to his companion.

"Carson?" mused Tommy. "Who is he, and what's his lay?"

"He claims to know where the Spider is, and is going to lead me to him."

"Fake!" sneered the boy.

"I half believe as much, but there will be no harm in seeing what there is in it."

"Game to lead us into a trap, maybe."

"That is what I should think, if the place of rendezvous was a low, questionable den, but it is at the Hotel Metropole.

Tommy was silent a moment, and then said:

"It's lucky we've got on our fancy togs, eh?"

"Rather. Plays right into our hands, eh, my boy?"

"That's right."

Meanwhile the stranger was wending his way up Broadway, and Thad and his young friend kept him in sight.

In due time he arrived at the hotel, walked in through the hotel entrance, thence into the bar, in the back part of which at small tables sat a dozen or more quiet, orderly, respectable gentlemen, some playing cards, and some smoking and talking.

The detective took a seat at one of the tables and Tommy with him, and ordered some mild drink.

Carson had seated himself at another table with several gentlemen, and entered into conversation.

Thad noticed that he neither drank nor entered into any game.

Burr looked about for some one whom he could fix upon as Paschal, but there was not a face in the whole assemblage which had the slightest resemblance to his.

"I wonder what the fellow means, anyway?" he finally grumbled, impatiently. "I don't believe the Spider is here, or ever had any notion of being here."

"I have an idea," said Tommy.

"What is that?"

"This is one of the Spider's henchmen, and this is a ruse to keep you out of the way until Paschal gives you the slip. He is afraid you will find out where he has moved to, and by keeping you out of settled down in some quarter where it will take a month of Sundays to find him."

"There may be some truth in this, and I shall waste no more time here. However, I shall see that chap before I go and ask for an explanation."

Thad sat there for some moments longer, keeping his eye riveted on the stranger, and at length succeeded in catching his eye.

He beckoned for him to come over to his table, but the fellow shook his head warningly, as much as to admonish the detective to keep mum a little while longer.

Thad held his peace for a few minutes longer, and at length said:

"Tommy, your prediction about this being a fake was undoubtedly true. I'm going."

He arose from his seat and started to leave the place, followed by Tommy.

But by the time he had reached the lobby the stranger overtook him, and, placing his hand on his arm to attract his attention, said:

"My dear sir, don't run away yet. He hasn't arrived yet, but the boys are expecting him every minute. He is bound to come, for there is a big game on."

"Are you sure of this?"

"There is no question about it."

Thad hesitated.

What motive could the fellow have for detaining him here, unless, indeed, as Tommy had suggested, it was to allow the Spider to make his escape.

"Well," he said, at last, "I'll wait a little longer, and then if he is not here, I shall go."

"Oh, you will not be detained much longer now," asserted the other, earnestly. "He will soon be here."

Thad walked back and resumed his seat, and another half-hour went by.

And then four new acquisitions to the company entered.

Thad scanned the face of each of the newcomers, but there was no more resemblance to Paschal in any of them than there was in those who were already there.

They had no more than taken their seats, when Carson looked across, caught Thad's eye, and made a sign which indicated that one of the newcomers was his man.

The detective could not understand which one he meant, and concluded that neither one was; that this was only a sham to keep the detective quiet a little longer.

So he shook his head dubiously, and again signified his intention of departing.

Then Carson shifted uneasily in his seat, and at length got up and came over to where Thad sat.

Leaning his arm on the table without looking down, he whispered:

"See the one with the full brown beard—looks like a well-to-do business man?"

Thad surveyed the group, and answered:

"Yes."

"That is he. Disguised, see?"

Carson then walked carelessly back and resumed his seat, keeping his eyes in another direction.

Thad was in something of a quandary.

If this was really Paschal, he had certainly succeeded in getting up a most excellent disguise, for the detective would never have recognized him in the world.

Again, how was he to approach him?

And then he called a waiter for the purpose of questioning him with regard to the stranger, and just then Carson left the room.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SLICK GAME.

When the waiter attended, Thad ordered some other refreshments as an excuse for sitting there, and asked the waiter who the gentleman with the brown beard was.

"Over at the third table?" asked the waiter.

"Yes."

"That is Mr. Halstead, sir."

"Ah, so it is."

And the detective could have sunk through the floor.

"By the way, waiter, do you know a gentleman who comes here sometimes, by the name of Paschal?"

The waiter, before answering, cast his eyes about over the group of gentlemen, and finally muttered:

"Why, sir, I thought he was here now. He was here just this minute. He must 'a' went out."

Tommy reached over and nudged the detective.

"That was our man, sir," he said.

"Which—"

And then the truth flashed upon Thad, and he gasped:

"Great Heavens! That was a slick game."

"Do you know," mused Tommy, "I thought once or twice that his voice was familiar, but I didn't like to presume too much. I thought it would be impossible to deceive you to that extent."

Thad was angry with himself, but after a moment's reflection, he laughed and said:

"Oh, well, we are all liable to get fooled once in a while."

"Especially by such sharpers as the Spider," added Tommy.

"Yes, he is a keen one, but we will get him yet, and then the laugh will be on our side."

At that moment the waiter returned with the refreshments, and the information:

"Yes, sir, that was him that just went out a while ago, sir. Some of the gentlemen say that he was a-talking with you."

"Very well," replied Thad, not anxious to prolong the subject.

Having disposed of their refreshments, the two men left the saloon and sauntered down Broadway.

The detective's mind was full of schemes, and he was consequently silent.

Tommy did not deign to disturb his reverie, and they walked on in silence.

At the corner of Thirty-sixth street they passed a group of men, and Thad noticed that one of them eyed him very closely, but when he looked at the man he was unable to recognize him.

But, as he and Tommy were crossing the street, he heard one of them say:

"If I am not mistaken, that is the chap?"

"Which one?" questioned another.

"The big one."

"Oh, well, they'll be in for it before he is through with them."

The two friends passed on in silence, but when they were a little further along Tommy said:

"I wonder if their remarks concerned us?"

"There is no doubt about it," replied Thad.

"What do you suppose they meant?"

"Hard telling; unless they mean that that rascal Paschal will have it in for us."

When they came to Thirty-third street, the detective glanced along the gloomy street and said:

"There is the scene of our lively work."

"Yes, and if I'm not mistaken, there's where we'll have some more of it."

Thad took the boy by the arm and led him hastily past the corner, and then walked him along Sixth avenue for some distance in silence.

At length he said:

"Tommy, I have an idea."

"Yes, sir."

"Can you play the drunkard?"

"To perfection."

"Then we can work it."

"What's that?"

Thad stopped and unraveled a plan to him.

The boy laughed and said:

"Good! We'll do it."

"But it is not quite late enough yet. What shall we do in the mean time?"

"Oh, walk about to kill time, sir."

At that moment two men passed them.

Or, rather, what seemed to be a man and a boy.

It was too dark at the spot to distinguish who they were, but Tommy whispered after they were past:

"If I am not more mistaken than I ever was in my life, that is the Patriarch and Claw."

"I believe you are right. I wonder where they are prowling to at this time of night?"

"Hard to tell. Looking for game, most likely."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to follow them, by way of killing time," suggested Thad.

"A first rate idea. Anything rather than idleness."

They turned and proceeded to shadow the two crooks, as they supposed them to be.

But they had only gone a short distance when they stopped.

It was at the corner of Thirty-third

again, and the Patriarch—if he it was—was in conversation with a hackman.

"I guess we'll turn back," suggested Thad, "and walk about until they are through with their chat."

And once more they turned down Sixth avenue.

They walked on for several blocks, discussing their plans, and at length came to Twenty-eighth street.

Everything was dark and quiet here, the elevated station looming overhead, shutting out what little light might otherwise have fallen on the street.

On one corner, in front of a saloon, stood a closed carriage.

As the two men crossed the street and came near the vehicle, they noticed a man standing by the side of it, apparently talking with some one inside.

Thad thought nothing of it until he was nearly opposite, when he heard the man say:

"That is about the only thing left me now. They are on my track hot and heavy, and it is either cut or swing."

Fortunately the detective had not passed far enough round the carriage for the speaker to catch sight of him, neither could he see the speaker.

But his suspicions were aroused, and, putting back his hand as a signal for Tommy to stop, they paused in the shadow of one of the elevated railway pillars and listened.

What the person inside the carriage said could not be heard, but the man outside resumed:

"Yes, Europe."

Then another silence, during which it was supposed the person inside was speaking.

And then the man outside:

"Oh, perhaps forever. In fact, I don't care whether I ever come back or not."

"Who is it?" whispered Tommy.

"I can't make out," answered Thad, "but I half suspect it to be Paschal."

"It don't sound like him."

"No, not exactly; but the matter he is talking about suits him most excellently."

And then during this latter part of the dialogue between the detective and the boy, the man got into the carriage and drove away.

"I've a great mind to follow them."

"Why don't you?"

"The want of a cab."

"Here is one."

As Tommy spoke, a cab came driving slowly along, and Thad hailed it.

The driver happened to be a man with whom Thad was acquainted.

"Keep that carriage in sight, Mullen," he said, handing the fellow a bill.

"O'll do it, sor," answered the Irishman, mounting his box.

The carriage had already got some start, but the cabby soon gained on it sufficiently so there would be no trouble in keeping it in sight.

"If this should turn out to be the Spider," observed Tommy, "and we should succeed in running him down, it would be a great surprise to him, after his little trick."

"Yes; for no doubt he thinks we are still at the Metropole."

At this point the carriage, which had been going down-town, turned a corner and drove toward the west.

It only went a short distance in this direction, when it stopped before a tall apartment house.

Cabby was cute enough to stop at sufficient distance from where the other vehicle had stopped to avoid suspicion, and close enough for the detective to watch the operations of its occupants.

Only one of the occupants alighted, which Thad could see was a man, but whether it was the same one who had stood outside of the carriage talking on Sixth avenue or not he could not tell.

The party who had alighted stopped to speak to some one inside, and Thad jumped out of the cab and walked on until he came within easy earshot of the speakers.

But, just as he did so, the man on the ground closed the carriage door, the vehicle wheeled away from the curb, and the

man turned toward the apartment house. In doing so he came face to face with the detective, who had placed himself there on purpose.

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger, politely.

"Don't mention it," rejoined Thad, with equal politeness.

And in that brief interval he had an opportunity of studying the stranger's features pretty thoroughly, and was satisfied that he had either made a mistake or that his man was still in the carriage.

Guessing that the latter was the case, Thad hurried back to his cab, jumped in, and told the driver to still keep the carriage in sight.

Fortunately it had not yet got out of sight, and the cabby whipped up and soon drew up within view of it.

The carriage now turned up-town, and kept on till it reached Forty-fourth street, where it turned eastward and again stopped.

The cab was close behind it, and the moment it stopped Thad was on the ground ready to receive the occupant when he alighted.

He had not long to wait, for the next instant a well-dressed gentleman sprang out.

Like the first one, he came face to face with the detective, but this one had not the politeness of the first.

So far from apologizing, he drew back, scowled, and then muttered angrily:

"Why don't you look where you are going, sir?"

"That is just what I am doing, above all things," retorted Thad, sarcastically. "I took particular pains to look where I was going when I followed you, Mr. Paschal."

"Paschal?" echoed the other. "My name is not Paschal; my name is Townsend!"

With that he strode past the detective toward the entrance of the apartment house.

The man certainly bore no resemblance to the Spider, and yet the voice was singularly similar to his.

Thad hesitated a moment and looked after the man, who had by this time entered the vestibule and was just putting his key into the door, and then hastily walked after him.

As the detective stepped into the vestibule the man turned and faced him.

"What do you want of me, sir?" he demanded.

"I have a warrant for your arrest," Thad replied.

"Arrest? For what crime?"

"The murder of Frederick Marboro!"

"And you mistake me for a man by the name of Paschal, I see."

"No, I do not mistake, but take you for that man. Will you come peaceably?"

The fellow was silent a moment, and then replied, with an indulgent laugh:

"Now, my good man, I do not wish to put you to any trouble. I see you've been drinking a little too much, but this sort of a joke to be played upon a gentleman at this time of night won't do. Go on about your business and nothing will be said, otherwise I shall have to call an officer."

"The latter is the very thing I should like you to do," answered Thad.

Without a word the man walked out of the house, looked up and down the street, and at length, espousing a policeman across the way, called him.

The policeman came across the street, and as soon as he was near enough the man said:

"Officer, I wish you would take charge of this fellow. He has been following and annoying me all evening."

The policeman turned to Thad with a scowl, and asked gruffly:

"Who are you and what do you want?"

Thad showed his badge, gave his name, and then explained that the man was Edward Paschal, who was wanted for murder, and that he had a warrant for him.

It took a long while to get the facts through the policeman's thick skull, and then he said:

"Wal, O'll hav' ter hear the gentle-
man's soide av it befoor Oi kin decoide."

With that he and the detective turned simultaneously to where the man had been standing a moment before, only to discover that he was gone!

It transpired that the carriage was also gone!

"He's guy yez the shlip, sor," commented the cop, with a chuckle.

"Yes; and all through your stupidity," growled Thad, as he walked away.

"Well, Tommy," he said, on re-entering the cab, "that was a wild-goose chase; and no mistake. Now we'll go back and try our other scheme."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A QUEER CUSTOMER.

In his haste to get moved the Spider pressed into service every one of his men that happened to be present at the time.

For it should be understood that ne had many in his gang who rarely, if ever, visited the den, and some, even, who did not know where it was.

But still unsatisfied with the progress this contingent were making, he at length lost patience and, calling Claw to him, said:

"Claw, go down on the street and pick up the first man you find and fetch him up. If you happen upon an idiot or a deaf mute, all the better. He won't be prying into my private affairs. Do you understand?"

"Yep!"

"Well go."

"Yep."

And Claw flew away.

Ten minutes later Claw ushered into the room a tall man, with long white-hair and beard that put that of the Patriarch to shame.

"Where in thunder did you resurrect this fossil, Claw?" growled the Spider. "He looks as if he had been buried for the last thousand years."

"I found 'im down de street and I tuck 'im 'cause he's so deaf dat he couldn't hear a blast go off 'in two feet on 'im."

"Can he lift?"

"I t'ink so. Better ax 'im."

Claw had never been accredited with any sense of humor whatever, and it is likely that this was a mere coincident, but had it been intentional, even the Patriarch could not have perpetrated a more cruel joke on poor, unsuspecting Spider, who had no more sense of humor than a mule.

Approaching the new arrival, Paschal called at the top of his voice:

"I say, my good man, can you lift?"

The deaf man smiled complacently, and said:

"Eh?"

"Can you lift?" bawled the Spider.

"Ye—yes—Jones," said the other, still grinning.

"Confound your name! I don't care a snap about /'er name—"

"Yes, yes, my name's Jones."

"I say curse your name! I want to know whether you can lift."

"Eh?" making a trumpet of his hand.

"Curse the idiot! One might as well try to talk to a wooden man."

"Here Regan, set this fellow to work, if you have lung power enough to make him hear."

"O'll make the sphalspeen hear mighty quick, an' not wear the lung out av me, nayther."

And, approaching the deaf man, he gave him a sounding slap on the back, that made him jump several feet into the air, and when the fellow looked around, the Irishman gave him a series of pantomimic directions for the work in hand.

And the stranger took hold with a will.

"Don't yez see?" said Regan. "A wink's as good as a nod to a bluid horse, and there's no use o' singin' foin' chunes to a deaf mute."

So well did the new man do his work that the moving was soon completed, and he had ingratiated himself into the good graces of the Spider and the Patriarch so thoroughly that they decided to keep him to do odd jobs.

"He's handy to have about," argued the old man, "and den dere's no danger on him carryin' tales out o' school. Dere's nuttin' like livin' in a fireproof house w'en dere's a fire ragin'."

The task of moving had been so fatiguing to the outlaws that they did not stir out of their new abode the following day, but the night following they began to grow restless.

They had done nothing of any importance since the diamond robbery, and were growing rusty.

"We must git out an' do suthin'," remarked the Patriarch.

Accordingly, along about midnight the Patriarch, taking Claw along with him, sallied forth to see what was afloat in the famous Tenderloin.

Spider and the others also went forth, each taking his own course.

The Patriarch strolled over toward Sixth avenue.

On the corner stood a hack, the driver of which walked up and down in front of his vehicle, in an apparently gloomy mood.

"W'ot's de matter, Dolan?" interrogated the old man, slapping his old acquaintance familiarly on the shoulder. "Ye're lookin' as blue as a herrin'."

"Och, murra," growled the hackman, "shure it's enough to make a mon blue the way toimes is. Be me sowl, Oi haven't had a dacint fare this week back, bad luck to 'em."

"W'ot d'ye call a decent fare, Dolan?"

"A purthy question it is for yez, Patriarch," growled the hackman. "Faix, phat sh'u'd it be but a foine aisy dhrunk wid a fat roll an' a gold watch an' him?"

"So dere's no drunks, is de?"

"Oh, there's a few, but not that dhrunk that they goes to shlape in the hack. Thim's the koind, me b'ye."

"I'm s'prised at youse, Dolan. Say! Youse is dead green. As long as youse is been in de Tenderloin, an' don't know how to handle a case like dat."

"Phwat would yez be doin' wid a case like that?"

"W'y, it's dead easy. All yer got ter do w'en yer git a case w'ot ain't lush enough ter sleep in de hack is to drive 'im round to de Elite Club."

"Phwat good would that be a doin' me?"

"W'y, don't yer see, we'll take keer on 'im dere, and divvy wid yer. See?"

Dolan reflected a moment, and finally exclaimed:

"Be me troth, it's not a bad oidee, at all, at all. Oi'll thry it. Yez'll trate me dacint, will yez?"

"Sure. Yer kind 'pend on us as yer kin on de Firs' Nash'nal Bank. By de way, if I ain't mighty mistaken htar comes a couple on 'em now. Come, Claw, let's shinny an' give a hones' man a chance ter make a hones' dollar."

Then confidentially to Dolan:

"Land 'em, me beauty, an' send 'em along rejoicin' our way. We'll take keer on 'em for you."

He and Claw then moved away.

A moment later two dudes, one a man of middle age and the other much younger, rolled up, evidently in an advanced state of intoxication.

"Hack, gints! Hack!" called out Dolan, placing himself in front of them. "Want a hack, gints?"

The older one of the men stopped, steadied himself with some difficulty, and said, in a thick voice:

"We wasser go Tenner-hic-Tennerloin. Drive's Tennerloin, cap'n?"

"Jump roight in, gints," cried the hackman, his eyes sparkling at the sight of the diamonds in the men's shirt fronts and the heavy gold watch chains hanging from their waistcoats. "Oi'll dhrive yez to the Tinderloin in no toime."

"Sure y' know way Tennerloin?" persisted the dude, doubtfully.

"Faix, sor, if Oi had as miny dollars as Oi know phere the Tinderloin is, Oi'd not be dhrivin' hack this noight, magoolish!"

"Well, if y' think can fin' way—why—hic—all right."

With the kind-hearted hackman's as-

sistance the two inebriated individuals were soon stored away inside the hack.

Dolan then drove them a roundabout way, and finally put them down at the door of the Elite Club.

Here they were received by the Patriarch with his most gracious and engaging smile, and conducted into the charmed circle of the famous club.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SURPRISE.

The two half-tipsy chaps were received in the reception room of the Elite Club by the Spider, who was attired in full dress and wore a flaring chrysanthemum in his button-hole, and a seductive smile on his face.

"I'm delighted to meet you, gentlemen. It is always a delight to meet gentlemen of the real upper crust; but, of course, we rarely have any other kind in here."

"Thanks, awfully," gurgled the elder man. "I'm sure you're a perf't gen-hie-tlem'. Have a drink wiz me."

"Thanks; don't care if I do. What will it be, gentlemen?"

"Champagne for me," said the younger man.

"Same for me," said the older one.

"And I will take the same," added Paschal. "Walter, three small bottles here."

"I see you have on'y gen'men here," commented the elder of the two men.

"Yes, sir; all high-class gentlemen," responded the Spider. "Some of them are a little eccentric as to dress and manners, but gentlemen, just the same."

At this juncture the Patriarch strolled over and, at the Spider's invitation, took a seat at the table.

"This perf't gen'man, too, s'pose?" mumbled the tipsy man, staring stupidly at the old man, "perf't gen'man?"

"Yes, this is my very old and highly esteemed friend, Judge Cartwright, Mr. —, I forget your name?"

"Smithers—Algernon George Smithers," returned the stranger, "and this is my frien', T'omson Townsen'. Glad t' know y', Judge."

"Powerful glad ter make yer superstitious acquaintance, Mr. Smithers," chuckled the Patriarch. "I yust ter know a Smithers—"

And to the old man's surprise and consternation the fellow at once grasped his hand with such vigorous warmth that he thought every bone would be reduced to powder.

The old man twisted and writhed under the terrible pressure, and at length was feign to cry out with the pain.

"Oh, Lord! Hully gee, Withers! But youse has a grip like a blacksmith! For God's sake, let up!"

"Oh, don't ask me to," muttered the tipsy dude.

"Oh! Oh! Let up on me flipper! Oh! Ye're crushing de bones ter pulp! Oh! Oh!"

At that moment the dude relaxed his grip on the hand, adroitly transferred it to the Patriarch's wrist, and, with a dexterous movement, sprung the hand open, when out dropped a vial.

The two men glared at each other and the Patriarch put back his disengaged hand in a significant manner.

At the same instant the Spider sprang up from the table and attempted to draw his revolver.

But scarcely had his hand gone in the direction of his hip pocket when the young dude's arm shot out like a pile driver and the robber went down in a heap.

Meanwhile the case had been but little better for the Patriarch.

The instant he reached for his gun the older dude, who already held his left hand secure, made a hasty movement and grasped the right.

"Not quite so fast, my fine fellow!" cried the dude, calmly. "We'll have no shooting here just yet, if you please."

Then, with a lightning movement, he brought the old man's hands together, and before he had time to think what was about to happen, slipped a pair of hand-

cuffs out of his pocket and snapped them on the Patriarch's wrists.

The whole thing had been accomplished in such a remarkably brief space of time that it was all over before the crowd, who had been attracted by the knocking down of the Spider had had time to realize what was in progress.

The next instant, however, the alarm was given, and the mob began to surge about.

Thad and Tommy (for the reader has already guessed that it was they) sprang to the wall, which was but a step away, placed their backs against it and drew a revolver in each hand.

They leveled the weapons on the mob and waited.

Thad uttered no word, but the flash of his terrible eyes and the expression of stone-wall firmness and determination on his face struck momentary terror to the crowd and caused them to hesitate.

By this time, however, the Spider had recovered from the stun the blow from Tommy's fist had given him, and regained his feet.

A hasty glance about him showed him the situation.

The crowd were panic stricken, and afraid to raise a hand, with the Spider's trusty lieutenant handcuffed and powerless, and the two supposed dudes with their pistols leveled on the mob, holding the key to the situation.

The Spider was furious.

"At them, men!" he yelled. "Are you all cowards, that you hesitate about attacking two miserable dudes?"

This was thrown out as an epithet of contempt to stimulate the nerve of the throng.

As a matter of fact, Paschal knew as well as the detective himself what he was.

But the crowd were too much frightened to be easily rallied.

They made a few feeble flurries, threw a few bottles and glasses, and some of the boldest even ventured a shot or two from safe hiding places. But when, instigated by this last extremity, he and Tommy opened fire, not to kill, but to scare, the mob stampeded to a man.

Even the Patriarch was hobbling out as rapidly as his rheumatic old legs would bear him, when Tommy, happening to notice him, ran alongside and tripped him up.

The Spider made his escape, however, but Thad felt very well satisfied to have captured his lieutenant and main standby.

"Without the Patriarch," observed Tommy, "the Spider will be like a cripple without his crutches."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CONFESSION.

"Well, Tommy, my boy, that was a very neat bit of work," observed Thad, when he and the young man got home that morning. "But our task is by no means done yet."

"No, sir; nor will it be until that rascal Paschal, is behind the bars."

"Yes; he is the chap we are after. Still, we were getting very close to the fountain-head when we captured the Patriarch."

"That is true. As I said, Spider, without the Patriarch is like a cripple without his crutches. But there is something even more important than that in this capture, in my opinion."

"What is that?"

"Under the necessary pressure, it is my opinion the old rascal will peach."

"Do you think so?"

"I am almost positive. He hates the Spider as His Satanic Majesty is said to hate holy water, and, besides, he is as arrant an old coward as ever ran from his own shadow. So, when the pinch comes, as between a close mouth and a long term and an open mouth and a short one, depend upon it, he will open his mouth—and that to the downfall and destruction of the Spider."

"This is important information, and we shall make the most of it."

At this point they were called to breakfast, and, in accordance with a universal

rule of the detective, no allusion was made to anything pertaining to the Secret Service during the meal.

When they were once more alone in the "studio," however, Thad varied the theme they had been discussing by saying:

"Now, Tommy, I wish you would tell me frankly just what connection you had with this affair. In spite of your confession that you were an accomplice, I cannot believe it. That is, I cannot but think there must be some mistake somewhere. You do not impress me as a young man who could willingly connect himself with any crooked business. Besides, if you were guilty of any wrong, why should you take such an enthusiastic interest in this work?"

Tommy was silent, and his eyes were downcast for some moments.

At length he looked up, and there was a glow of brave determination on his face as he began:

"I'm going to tell you the whole true story of this affair, Mr. Burr, and leave you to judge how guilty I am. I know that you cannot find any other verdict but that of guilty against me when you have heard everything, but you are so good and kind, and know so well what temptations a young man has to withstand, that I know you will do the best that can be done for me, and, at all events, advise me for the best."

"So I shall, my boy," answered the detective, feelingly; "and, unless your crime is as black as Pluto's beard, I'll wager a key-bugle against a politician's soul that we can manage to cover it up with the benign whitewash of explanation and forgiveness."

After another short silence Tommy began and related the whole story, from the time of his abstracting the five hundred dollars from his employer's safe to play on the races, of his remarkable winning of the twenty-five thousand dollars; of his completely losing his head; of his going into the saloon, and finally of having his pockets picked of every cent he possessed.

Then came the recital of his terror and desperation at the prospect of being arrested for the theft; of his confiding his secret to the Patriarch, whom he mistook for an honest, fatherly, and benevolent old gentleman—although he was satisfied now that it was he that had picked his pocket; of the old crook's pretended solicitude and offer to loan him the five hundred dollars to put back in the safe—with the wicked proviso that he should leave the door of his employer's house unlocked so that the robbers might enter and commit the diamond robbery.

Here Tommy dwelt at some length upon the terrible struggle he underwent, and how the haunting anticipation of being arrested for theft, and the dreadful specter of the prison and a subsequent blighted life caused him to weaken and yield to the temptation.

Then came a graphic and terrible description of the murder, which was so vividly portrayed that Thad could almost imagine he witnessed the scene at that moment.

Later on he described how the rascals, having got him into their toils, had wound the pernicious mesh about him tighter and tighter, until they had at last initiated him into their devilish order.

Then it was that, realizing his own degradation, of the downward road along which he was plunging pell-mell, and, above all, feeling the cruel injustice which was being done an innocent man, his soul rebelled, his better manhood arose within him and denounced his other, his weaker self, for its cowardice and pusillanimity, and he determined to throw off the yoke of crime and servitude, and fight his masters to the death.

There was something almost godly in the grand heroism of the young detective's face when he finished the recital, and Thad, who was almost an idolator of heroism, stood gazing at him for a minute or two, transfixed with wonder and admiration.

Then, suddenly, he came to realize who it was that had been speaking, and, con-

trasting the boy as he had known him with the magnificent being he now realized him to be, he lost all restraint, and, yielding to the impulse, clasped the noble fellow in his arms, while tears flowed from the great man's eyes.

A moment of silence passed, during which the detective continued to press the boy to his heart, and then he gently released him and grasped his hand.

"My boy," he cried, in a broken voice, "you are one of the noblest and bravest men I ever met; noblest, because you were willing to sacrifice yourself for a fellow-creature, and bravest, because you dared to defy your own self. It is a brave man, my boy, who is not afraid of himself."

"You must still admit that I am guilty of a great crime?"

"You are guilty of an indiscretion rather than a crime. In the eyes of the law you would be deemed an accessory to a crime, because what you did led to, or rendered possible, the crime that followed. You committed a crime in the first instance in taking the money to bet with.

"What you did subsequently was the indirect result of this first act, and you were more or less forced into. But, to sum up, the noble work you have since accomplished will, in a great measure, condone for your evil deeds, both in the eyes of justice and in the eyes of that greater tribunal, eternal right!"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Burr, for these kind words of encouragement! I feel now that I can complete the fight with redoubled vigor. You will see me through, won't you?"

"I will, my boy; and I feel sure that when the judge hears the truth, neither he nor the jury can find it in their hearts to adjudge you guilty of a crime. But let us change an unpleasant subject. We must now get a little sleep and be ready to renew the campaign to-night. I hope to complete the work before another sun."

"I hope we shall. But I fear we sha'n't find our man in the same place."

"No; that is my greatest fear," said Thad, "but—"

At that moment there came a rap at the door.

When the detective opened it the maid, whom he found there, told him there was a young man at the door who wished to see him.

"Let him come in," said Thad.

Then, turning to Tommy, as the maid disappeared, he said:

"I wonder who that can be?"

But before the young man had time to reply, or Thad to speculate any further, there came another rap at the door, and when it was opened this time, they were both greatly astonished to see Claw standing before them.

"Well, young man," demanded Thad, in a stern voice, "what brings you here?"

"W'y, ye see," began the dwarf, twisting his fingers nervously, "de boss—dat is, de Spider's a-goin' ter do de slide ac' ter-night, an' if youse wants ter knab 'im, yer'll hafter be dead slick, see."

This had the effect of increasing the detective's astonishment, created by the sight of the dwarf; but, after a little reflection, he asked:

"Which way is he going?"

"Ter Yooper—on de White Star boat Tootonic."

"The Teutonic, eh? Let me see, their dock is at the foot of West Tenth street. Thanks."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN UNEXPECTED WITNESS.

"What do you think of it, Tommy?" queried Thad, as soon as the dwarf had departed, which he did as soon as he had given the information.

"I don't know; but I should say that it was a hoax."

"Either that, or there is a general breaking up of the gang, and this is the first indication of it. You have told me that the members all liked the Patriarch. How did they stand toward the Spider?"

"They disliked him, almost to a man,

in about the same ratio that they liked the old man."

"In that case, I do not see that there is any reason to believe otherwise than that this fellow has told the truth. He may have some grievance against Paschal which he has been harboring for a long time, and now that he finds that he is going away, he has decided to split and have his revenge. It is only a matter of time when men of this character, banded together for robbery, will betray their leader. I never saw it fail."

"You will go to the White Star dock to-night, then?"

"Not exactly to-night. The Teutonic does not sail till eight in the morning, but the passengers are supposed to be aboard by seven, and some of them are aboard a little after six. It is likely that our man will go aboard pretty early, as it will be safer for him to traverse the streets before it is too light."

"There is another thing to be taken into consideration, sir."

"What is that?"

"He will be likely to go disguised."

"I have considered that; but I think that between us, we shall be able to penetrate any disguise he may be able to get up."

The two men then separated, to go to their respective apartments to seek a little rest preparatory to the work before them.

About midnight that night Thad and Tommy paid another visit to the notorious Elite Club.

This time they were disguised as toughs, such as are commonly seen about bar-rooms in the Tenderloin and the Bowery.

Thad wore a black, close-cropped wig, which came down to within an inch of his eyes, giving him the appearance of having no forehead to speak of, and an enormous mustache, jet-black in hue.

In addition, he wore a suit of peculiarly "loud" appearance, and a display of cheap jewelry that would have made the average East Side swell saloon-keeper green with envy.

He also carried a cane of enormous size, with a bulldog's head on the knob.

Tommy was somewhat similarly rigged out, except that his face was clean of beard, but he wore that peculiar scowl which gentry of this class deem essential in order to be considered in good form.

They both walked with the regulation Bowery swagger.

As a consequence, they attracted very little attention when they walked into the club.

A few of the hangers-on cast envious or admiring glances at them, according to taste or state of finances.

Thad and Tommy strolled about the room with a contemptuous swagger for some time, in the vain hope of catching a glimpse of the Spider, but he was nowhere to be seen, and they soon concluded that he was keeping shady.

At length the detective and his friend seated themselves at a table and ordered refreshments.

Here they sat for a long time, watching the mad throng in its delirious striving after pleasure.

The hall was about forty feet long, and nearly as wide, and brilliantly lighted by a blazing constellation of gas-globes and electric lights.

The walls and ceiling were gorgeously decorated.

The floor was studded at intervals with small round tables, surrounded by from two to four chairs.

At one end of the room a band of music kept up a constant noisy blare and jangle, while about the room, promenading or sitting at the tables, were hundreds of patrons.

As the hour advanced, the crowd grew noisier and noisier, until, by one o'clock, there was such a din that the music could scarcely be heard.

About this time Thad noticed a well-dressed, respectable old gentleman, who appeared dreadfully out of place in this resort, moving about the room, hobnobbing with first this crowd and that, drinking liberally and spending money prodigally.

He did not appear, for all that, to be very much intoxicated, but seemed to be in most exuberant spirits.

And what seemed the strangest part of it, nobody appeared to know who the old gentleman was, although everybody shook hands with him and drank at his invitation.

Another peculiar feature was the presence of another old man, tall and solemn, who seemed to act in the capacity of valet, and dogged the other's steps wherever he went in grave silence.

During the whole time he had been in the room, the eccentric old gentleman had not been seen to sit, but at length he appeared to have become weary, and strolled over and sat down at the next table to the one at which Thad and Tommy sat.

Catching sight of the detective and his friend just then, he called out to them good-naturedly:

"I say, gentlemen, will you have something with me?"

Thad was about to decline, but the old gentleman arose and moved over to his table, at the same time, in the most gracious manner, insisting:

"Gentlemen, you won't refuse to take one drink with me? I am a lonely, forlorn old man, with not a relative or soul whom I can call friend in the world. Moreover, this is my last day in America. To-morrow morning I sail for the old world, where I shall spend the remainder of my days."

Upon hearing this, Thad changed his mind, and concluded to drink with the old gentleman.

"You see, gentlemen," he pursued, "I am a rich man. I have all the money I know what to do with—more, in fact—and what is the use of my staying here and worrying myself about business? But here we are!" he suddenly broke off, as the refreshments arrived. "Gentlemen, my regards."

"The same," responded the detective, raising his glass.

"Here is good luck, and a merry voyage on the Teutonic," added Tommy.

"Eh?" growled the stranger, lowering his glass.

Thad laughed.

"My friend happens to know that the Teutonic is the only ship that goes in the morning," explained he, "and blessed if he would have known that only his sweetheart is going on her, and he's so badly broken up over it that I had to bring him out to-night to jolly him up a bit."

"Poor fellow," murmured the old gentleman, in a tone of genuine sympathy. "I was young myself once, and had a sweetheart."

Thad had kept his eye closely riveted on him all along, and now, as he raised his arm in drinking, and his coat fell apart at the bosom, the keen eyes of the detective darted in and made a hasty but complete inventory of every article of jewelry, every badge and chain, that adorned his vest or shirt-front.

Yes, it was there—there could be no mistake about it.

He had examined and studied it, day after day, a thousand times during the past few weeks, until it had come to be as familiar to him as the face of his own mother.

And here was its counterpart—its twin, so to speak.

And then the detective took a fragment of a watch-chain from his pocket, and, holding it up carelessly before the stranger's eyes, said, in an easy, indolent tone:

"That is a quaint design of a chain you have there, old gentleman. One would scarcely expect to find its duplicate in Christendom, and yet, as you see, I have it."

The old gentleman stared at the fragment as though it had been a horrid phantom, turned pale, and gasped:

"Where did you get that?"

"In the room where you dropped it the night you murdered Frederick Marboro!" muttered Thad, in a voice that was terrible.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ANOTHER SURPRISE.

The Spider, in spite of all his sang-froid, was dumbfounded for the moment.

It is doubtful whether he guessed just who his accuser was, but he was well aware that whoever he was he had an extremely and unpleasantly strong case against him.

He was unable to speak for some minutes, and sat staring dumbly at the detective.

At length he regained something of his wonted composure, and, laughing lightly, remarked:

"You are something of a practical joker, I take it. But perhaps you will be good enough to explain what you mean by the assertion you made just now?"

"With pleasure," responded Thad, in an impressive voice. "In the first place, I want to inform you that I never was further from joking in my life. Now, with regard to my assertion:

"You asked me where I had got the bit of broken watch-chain, which you evidently recognized, or you would not have asked the question, and I informed you that I had picked it up in the room where you murdered Frederick Marboro. In other words, I charge you, Edwin Paschal, with that murder."

"And I," retorted the fellow, coolly, "who am not Edwin Paschal, but Lawrence Beauchamp, charge you with having uttered a willful and malicious lie."

"Let it pass. Under different circumstances I should knock you down, as my friend here did last night, but it is not worth while at present.

"I have sufficient proof to convict you, both of this crime and that of the theft of Mrs. Lonsdale's diamonds, and when it comes to a matter of identification, that will not be difficult, when your disguise is removed.

"Perhaps," and here Thad drew out the jewel case, threw up the lid, and held it up to his gaze.

"Perhaps you will be able to identify that?"

Paschal attempted to jump to his feet, but was restrained by the detective's powerful hand.

"Not so hasty, my good fellow. I have use for you yet. I see that you do recognize the jewel case, which, I need hardly inform you, was found in your own apartments, and this is pretty nearly proof enough that you are the man for whom I hold a warrant—Edwin Paschal—otherwise known as the Spider, and the murderer of Frederick Marboro."

"It is a lie!" roared the fellow, but with failing courage.

"Is it? This young man here, who is at present disguised, but who in his proper person is known as Thomas Watson, was a witness of that deed, and is ready to testify to your guilt."

"It is a lie! A base, wicked lie! You cannot believe a word that young rascal tells you. He is a thief, sir!"

"Admitting all that, with the other corroborative evidence, I guess his testimony will be taken. By the way, if you are not Edwin Paschal, how do you happen to know so much about the young man?"

"I've heard about him."

"A good deal about him, haven't you?"

"Well, yes; a good deal."

"You had the pleasure of initiating him into your order of thugs, I believe?"

"Don't deny it, Spider," put in Tommy. "Don't go back on one of your brothers of the ancient and honorable order of thugs. Don't do it!"

"I know nothing about your vulgar slang, sir," sneered the Spider, making another ineffectual attempt to rise.

"Not just yet, my good friend," protested the detective. "There is no hurry. Now, as you have shown me by your actions and self-contradictions that there is neither any doubt about your being the man for whom my warrant calls, or that you are the murderer of Frederick Marboro, you will do me a favor by confessing at least your identity."

"If you refuse to do this, I shall be

under the painful necessity of taking you along on chance and allowing them to discover your identity over at the Tombs."

"I tell you, sir, that I had nothing to do with that murder."

"Perhaps, then, you know who the criminal is?"

"Yes, I do, if that is any satisfaction to you."

"Well, who is it?"

"Robert Avondale!"

"How do you know this?"

"Because he was the last man in the room with the dead man, where he was discovered by the old servant."

This was delivered in a remarkably calm voice, considering the circumstances, and by the time he had concluded the speech he had regained a good deal of his old calm indifference.

"But, suppose Avondale were here, what—"

"Robert Avondale is dead! Any fool knows that!"

"But, supposing he were not dead, and was here, what do you think he would say?"

"That he was guilty of the murder! He knew he was guilty, otherwise he would not have run away."

"That looks plausible," said Thad, playing with his victim as a cat does with a mouse before devouring it. "But what proof have we that he is dead?"

"Every proof. The mortality report of the wreck—everything. His own wife knows he is dead, and is in mourning for him at this minute."

"Indeed."

"Yes, sir."

"You have kept remarkably well posted on these matters, Mr. Beauchamp."

"Pretty well," answered the other, wincing a little under the obvious sarcasm of the remark.

"How came you to take such an interest in the matter?"

"Oh, I don't know. I always do take a good deal of interest in such matters."

At that moment some one touched the detective on the shoulder, and on looking up he saw that it was Claw.

"Dere's some gents ha' w'ot wants ter see yer, sir," observed the dwarf, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

A further glance revealed the presence of two policemen with the Patriarch in charge.

"Ah! Just in time," said Thad, rising. "Patriarch, come forward and see if you recognize your old friend, the Spider."

The Patriarch shuffled up with a grin on his face, and peered curiously at Paschal.

"I t'ink if de w'iskers was removed I'd recognize him better," murmured the old man.

At that moment Paschal made another attempt to jump up, but Thad caught him in time, and, while he was about it, snatched the gray wig and beard off.

"Ah, dat's better," chuckled the old man. "Now he looks as much like himself as a twin brudder. Spider, how air yer? I'd shake hands wid yer, only fer dese pesky wristlets w'ot dey've got on me."

Spider grunted, but made no reply.

"Now, Mr. Detective," resumed the Patriarch, "I s'pose yer want me ter tell yer who done dat job o' killin'?"

"Yes, I should like to know."

"A curse upon you for a traitor!" snarled the Spider. "I suppose you will take the evidence of this thief, too?"

At this point the police had to push back the crowd that was surging about.

"Wal, call me w'ot yer like. I confess ter bein' a t'ief, but, t'ank God, I ain't w'ot youse is—a murderer! Dis, gentlemen, is de man w'ot killed Fred Marboro!"

"It's a lie!" roared the Spider. "An infamously lie!"

This time he had succeeded in regaining his feet, but was held in restraint by the detective.

He glanced at the old man like some wild animal.

The Patriarch, in turn, grinned at him complacently.

"So yer denies it, do yer?"

"I do. The man who killed Fred Marboro is dead."

"That's another lie!" interposed the solemn old man who had been standing calmly by all this time, pushing forward.

"Who are you?" demand'd Paschal, apprehensively.

"Robert Avondale!" replied the man, snatching off his gray wig and beard. "The deaf man has had ears enough in the past few days to hear sufficient to convict you of the murder which you would have put upon me."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN EXPLANATION.

Paschal was so terrified at the sight of Avondale that he could neither speak nor move, and stood transfixed as with a spell staring at the man who he had supposed was only a poor deaf, half-witted old codger, and now turned out to be the man upon whom he had tried to shift his own crime.

So abstracted was he, in fact, that he appeared utterly unconscious of or indifferent to the proceeding when the detective placed the handcuffs on him.

As he was about to be led away, he muttered, his eyes still fixed upon Avondale's face:

"I thought you were dead."

"Rather, you hoped I was. I presume if I had perished in that wreck, it would have saved you a good deal of trouble."

"Oh, no. It would have been just the same. Fate had it in for me, and it was only a matter of time when she would have done me anyway. I blame no one, and, as for myself, nobody who knows all the facts will blame me for what I did."

"Of course I admit that I had no business in Marboro's house—that is, business according to an honest man's idea, but, so help me, God! I had no intention of killing him, or even doing him an injury. So there you have it, gentlemen, and make the most of it."

"Fair an squar'!" cried the Patriarch, "an' to de queen's taste, as de cannibal king said w'en dey brought in de roasted missionary. I wouldn't 'a' t'ought yer had de nerve ter tell de truth like dat, Spider. Wal, I hope de 'lectricutionist 'll put on soft gloves when he touches ye off, 'cause yer allus was a tender critter. Ta, ta, Spider, me kidney!"

Paschal made no response, except to dart a contemptuous glance at his old lieutenant, and he was led scowling from the room.

There is one incident connected with the above scene that requires a little explanation.

When Thad first caught sight of what appeared to be the respectable old gentleman, he decided at once who in reality he was.

This he guessed from the man's walk and certain movements of his arms, which are characteristic with every man, so that, in reality, there is no such thing as disguise to the expert eye.

At about the same time he made this discovery, as he believed it to be, the detective espied Claw sauntering around.

Calling the dwarf to him, Thad pointed out the eccentric old gentleman and asked him who it was:

Claw could not guess at first, but, after watching the man's movements for some moments, he said he believed it was the Spider in disguise.

"I know who kin tell, if he was here," said the dwarf, with a significant grin.

"Who?"

"Patriarch."

This was the keynote for a happy thought to the detective.

Sitting down at a table, he took out his notebook, and, tearing a sheet from it, wrote this note:

"Warden Fallon, Tombs Prison:

"Dear Sir—Kindly send the man known as the Patriarch, arrested by me last night, in custody of efficient guard, to West Thirty-third street—The Elite Club—for purpose of identification. I know this is a little irregular, John, but case is

urgent—man I wish identified is to sail to-morrow morning for Europe, and arrest must be made to-night. Please oblige an old friend, John. Very sincerely,

"THAD BURR."

"There, my boy," he said, handing the note to Claw. "You know where the Tombs prison is, don't you?"

"Yep."

"Take that to whoever you find at the Franklin street entrance, and tell him that it must be delivered to Warden Fallon at once."

And so well did Claw execute his mission, and so potent was the name of Thad Burr, that, within an hour from the time the message was despatched, the two policemen arrived with the old man in custody.

Upon being questioned with regard to the whereabouts of the diamonds stolen from Mrs. Lonsdale, Paschal doggedly replied that they were in the Patriarch's possession the last he knew of them.

When Thad called upon the Patriarch and asked about the gems, he disclaimed all knowledge of them.

"But Paschal says you have them."

"Did de Spider say dat?"

"He did."

"Did anybody else say so?"

"Yes; all the gang have given you away on this point."

"Den I s'pose dere's no use holdin' out no longer. W'en de bottom drops outen de pail, dere's no use tryin' ter save de water wid yer fingers. Go to my room in de Elite—dey'll show it to yer—and dere ye'll find a little old chest. In de bottom o' de chest ye'll find de diamonds sewed up in an old quilt."

"Thanks, Patriarch," said Thad, kindly. "I shall use my influence in your behalf at the trial, and see that you get as light a sentence as possible."

"Ye're very kind, sir, but yer needn't boddier yer head much 'bout dat. De old man's spent t'irty out o' de sixty year o' his life in one lock-up or anudder, an' it don't make much difference how he divides de few years dat's left, w'edder inside or outside."

"Still, it would be pleasanter to die a free man."

"Oh, I dunno 'bout dat. Life's a sort of a handcuff's at best, and death's de turnkey w'ot comes in an' knocks 'em off wid his cold hammer. But, w'ot I want ter ax yer is dis: Yer know de boy, Tommy Watson, don't yer?"

"I know him very well."

"He's a good lad, as brave as a dog, and wid a soul in him as clean an' shinin' as a golden eagle's."

"Your estimate of the boy is none too high. I know him to be all you say, and more."

"Wal, in dat same old chest ye'll find, sewed up in an old ragged coat, some money. Dere's summers nigh fifty t'ousand dollars. Twenty-five t'ousand o' dat b'longs ter Tommy—I robbed 'im on't de night o' de murder an' diamond robbery. Give 'im dat, 'cause it's his'n, and give 'im de udder twenty-five t'ousand as a present from de old man, wid his kindest regards."

The rest of that day was spent most pleasantly by the detective.

In the first place, he called at the room lately occupied by the Patriarch, rummaged through the old chest and found the old quilt, with the diamonds sewed in the lining, and also the ragged coat, in the lining of which he found an enormous wad of bank-notes of various denominations, which, when counted, amounted to over forty-nine thousand dollars.

His next move was to call upon Mrs. Lonsdale and present her with her diamonds.

After looking them over and finding that they were all there, she looked up at the detective with a smile, and said:

"This is a most delightful surprise, sir. I had abandoned all hope of ever getting my diamonds again. What can I do to repay you?"

"There was a reward of five thousand, I believe, was there not?" he asked, politely.

"There was. That is yours, of course.

But, it is not enough. I want to do something more."

"Indeed, it is too much. There is a reward of ten thousand dollars more for capturing the murderer of Marboro. I will also get that!"

"Did you make that capture?"

"I did, madam."

"Then you will allow me to present you, as a special present, twenty thousand dollars."

"I couldn't think of it."

"But I insist. I am rich. Twenty thousand dollars is nothing to me, and it may be something to you. You will not refuse me, now, will you?"

She was too beautiful a woman, and her persuasive powers were too great for even the matter-of-fact detective to resist, and he finally accepted the most generous present.

His next call was at the house of Robert Avondale, whom he found happily restored to his family, with the consciousness of being an innocent man.

"And it is all through your efforts, Mr. Burr," declared the grateful wife joyously.

"Not entirely, madam," returned Thad, modestly. "I discovered who the guilty party was partly through the efforts of others, but the revelation of your husband's innocence was the work of that noble boy, Tommy Watson."

"Tommy Watson!" echoed Avondale. "God bless him for a brave, noble, self-sacrificing lad! He has been to me a loyal champion. I owe everything to him."

"He is all that you say of him, and more," rejoined the detective, rapturously; "and he will be well rewarded."

"I only wish that I were rich enough to reward you both," sighed Avondale.

Just then the bell rang, and when the door was opened, a young man presented himself at the door.

"Is this Mr. Robert Avondale?" he asked.

He was answered in the affirmative.

"I'm from the law firm of Marvin & Stowe," he explained. "They are the attorneys for the estate of the late Frederick Marboro, and I am requested to hand you this letter."

With trembling fingers Avondale took the letter and tore it open.

"What is it, love?" inquired his wife, looking over his shoulder.

"Why, my dear," he cried, excitedly, "Marboro has left us all his property! It seems, from this, that, during a spell of illness some time before his death, he fell into a fit of remorse over the money he had swindled me out of, and executed this will in our favor."

"Favors never come singly," observed Thad.

Soon afterward he left them to the enjoyment of their happiness, and when he reached home he found Tommy awaiting him.

"Well, Tommy," Thad began, "things have panned out as you hoped."

"What do you mean, sir?"

Thad handed him the package of bank-notes.

"This is from the Patriarch," he explained.

"What! My twenty-five thousand that he robbed me of?"

"Yes; and almost as much more, which the old man sends as a present, with his compliments."

"Bully for the Patriarch!" chuckled the young man, beside himself with joy. "He is not half the old rogue we took him to be. Now I shall be able to marry my little girl out in the country."

"Do so, my boy, and much happiness to you."

It should be explained that when Tommy's case came up in court the jury acquitted him without leaving their seats.

THE END.

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